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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

THE GENERAL AND PARTICULAR:
BLAKE AGAINST REYNOLDS AND BURKE

by



CAROLYN MAE STEPA

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled "The General and Particular: Blake Against Reynolds and Burke" submitted by Carolyn Mae Stepa in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

ABSTRACT

Blake's aesthetic position, contrary to that of such eighteenth-century writers as Reynolds, Burke, and Johnson, is based on his conviction that "To Generalize is to be an Idiot To Particularize is the Alone Distinction of Merit." Throughout Blake's work, the antithesis of the particular and general is central to a similar opposition between the imagination and reason, individual liberty and social oppression, perception and abstraction, "Definite & Determinate Identity" and the "Indefinite." For Blake, notions of "general nature" can only be vague and arbitrary, whereas the perception of "minute particulars" yields true vision, the realization that each man is a member of the "Universal Brotherhood of Man."

In order to examine Blake's conception of the particular, as well as its paradoxical relation to the universal or "perfect Whole," this thesis will first consider Reynolds' dialectical definition of "general nature" in his Discourses on Art and his reasons for rejecting the particular in the aesthetic pursuit. Next, Blake's own dialectical methods will be followed in an attempt to define the terms he uses in his annotated argument against Reynolds' aesthetic theory. Burke's aesthetic position will also be outlined as it appears in his Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful, and then contrasted with

Blake's. Finally, this thesis will examine Blake's poetic treatment of the particular, general, and universal in his greatest epic, Jerusalem.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND CITATIONS

Quotations of the works of Blake, Reynolds, and Burke are from the following editions, and citations to each edition are given in parentheses in the text:

Sir Joshua Reynolds, Discourses on Art, ed. Stephen O. Mitchell (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1965);

Edmund Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful, ed. James T. Boulton (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958);

William Blake, The Poetry and Prose of William Blake, ed. David V. Erdman (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1970).

Citations to the Discourses and to the Enquiry are designated by "D" and "E" respectively, followed by page number. Citations to Blake's works are abbreviated as follows:

The Prophecies, referred to by Blake's own plate and line numbers:

J	<u>Jerusalem</u>
M	<u>Milton</u>
FZ	<u>The Four Zoas</u>
BU	<u>The Book of Urizen</u>
BL	<u>The Book of Los</u>
VDA	<u>Visions of the Daughters of Albion</u>

Shorter poems and prose references followed by the page number of Erdman's edition:

EV	<u>The Everlasting Gospel</u>
KG	<u>"The Keys of the Gates"</u>
AI	<u>"Auguries of Innocence"</u>
SE	<u>Songs of Experience</u>
NNR	<u>"There is No Natural Religion"</u>
ARO	<u>"All Religions are One"</u>
MHH	<u>The Marriage of Heaven and Hell</u>
VLJ	<u>"A Vision of the Last Judgment"</u>

Miscellaneous references again followed by Erdman's page number:

PS	Prose
PT	Poetry
L	Letters
MG	Marginalia

Square brackets in the Erdman edition have been replaced by braces: { } .

William Blake's radical opposition to eighteenth-century British empiricism is evident everywhere in his writings: as a self-proclaimed prophet of the imagination, Blake reacted against all the natural, moral, and aesthetic philosophers who supported the power of reason and the empirical methods of observation and experiment, no matter how diverse their views. To Blake's mind, any direct influence of one of these writers upon another was inconsequential, for the demonic trinity of "Bacon & Newton & Locke" had already tainted the minds of all Englishmen, and the reign of the Age of Enlightenment had ironically become systematic tyranny.

Among the aesthetic philosophers whom Blake denounces are Edmund Burke and Sir Joshua Reynolds; and in his annotations to the latter's Discourses on Art, Blake assumes an ideological and literary kinship between them which he then equates with the ideas of Bacon, Newton, and Locke:

<Burke's Treatise on the Sublime & Beautiful is founded on the Opinions of Newton & Locke on this Treatise Reynolds has grounded many of his assertions. in all his Discourses I read Burkes Treatise when very Young at the same time I read Locke on Human Understanding & Bacons Advancement of Learning on Every one of these Books I wrote my Opinions & on looking them over find that my Notes on Reynolds in this Book are exactly Similar. I felt the Same Contempt & Abhorrence then; that I do now. They mock Inspiration & Vision. (MG 650)

We do not, however, know exactly when Blake read either

Burke's Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful or Reynolds' Discourses. David V. Erdman dates Blake's annotations to Reynolds somewhere between 1798 and 1809,¹ which would make them the product of his mature years. Burke's Enquiry was first published in 1757, the year of Blake's birth; and when Blake says he read it when "very young," the irony of the comment is suggestive: obviously, Blake intends to dismiss any work which "mocks inspiration and vision."

But Blake does not dismiss the ideas of Burke and Reynolds without careful consideration of them. As Lawrence Lipking points out, in Reynolds' Discourses

Blake could encounter some of his own favorite principles of art . . . insidiously combined with doctrines he believed to be so pernicious that only a devil could have conceived them. So smooth a mixture of contraries seemed to violate not only Blake's ideas about painting, but the sources of his creativity.²

One of the aesthetic principles enunciated by Reynolds of which Blake was especially contemptuous concerns the distinction between the general and particular in human nature and in art; this distinction, a central subject of the aesthetic criticism of such thinkers as Johnson and Hume,³ also underlies many of the premises of Burke's Enquiry. All these writers uphold the principle of general nature, and claim that it is achieved by means of an artistic rendering of what has remained true and beautiful for all men throughout human history. The particular aspects of nature, whether human or objective, are by the same token too minute, too

specific, and too peculiar to have any universal aesthetic appeal.

Blake takes the contrary aesthetic position and maintains that "To Particularize is the Alone Distinction of Merit" (MG 630). It is his belief that general principles, general ideas, and general knowledges are all fictions created by empirical reasoning. Blake opposes the aestheticians of his day by taking issue with Reynolds' conception of general nature, arguing that such ideas are nothing more than abstractions divorced from the reality of particular beings. Moreover, Blake asserts that only "minute particulars" can be perceived by the mind, and any attempt to formulate broad notions of the general will lead to vagueness of thought. For this reason, Blake's own work continually seeks to define and identify precise ideas; as he tells Reynolds, in art "Grandeur of Ideas is founded on Precision of Ideas" (MG 636).

The purpose of Blake's art is to express his central vision of the unity of all aspects of being in either the universal or individual form. In Jerusalem he presents a psychological dramatization of what he feared as the active subordination of the individual person to general abstractions or "moral laws," and makes his plea for the "Universal Brotherhood of Man." Only in such a brotherhood, Blake argues, will the freedom of the individual be preserved; and only the individual can preserve that ideal within his mind by acting in a spirit of benevolence. For

Blake, politics, religion, art, and science are all one humanistic concern, and they must work at all times toward the integration of man with man.

NOTES

¹ David V. Erdman, ed., The Poetry and Prose of William Blake (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1970), p. 801.

² Lawrence Lipking, The Ordering of the Arts in Eighteenth-Century England (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1970), p. 166.

³ For discussions of the literary history of the general and particular, see Houghton W. Taylor, "'Particular Character': An Early Phase of a Literary Evolution," PMLA, 60 (1945), 161-74; and Scott Elledge, "The Background and Development in English Criticism of the Theories of Generality and Particularity," PMLA, 62 (1947), 147-82.

During the period 1769 to 1790, Sir Joshua Reynolds, as first president of the newly-founded Royal Academy of London, delivered to its members and students the series of fifteen lectures which now form the body of his Discourses on Art. Reynolds saw the occasion as an opportunity to form the taste and direct the practice of both critics and artists,¹ and accordingly the Discourses became a full articulation of his aesthetic theory. Lawrence Lipking notes the "many diverse purposes and modes of thought" which are harmonized in the Discourses, and reminds us that

Reynolds intended the Discourses to instruct students; to represent the aims and aspirations of the Royal Academy; to establish a canon, a critical survey of the history of art; to demonstrate that his profession was noble; and to ascertain the basis of painting in psychology and philosophy.²

Reynolds was certainly conscious of the enormity of this self-imposed task, and, in the concluding Discourse, speaks of how he set about solving the problems it posed:

To this work . . . I could not be said to come totally unprovided with materials. I had seen much, and I had thought much upon what I had seen; I had something of an habit of investigation, and a disposition to reduce all that I observed and felt in my own mind, to method and system. (D 227)

The psychological orientation of this system and the dialectical nature of Reynolds' method form the subject of an article by Walter J. Hipple, Jr.,³ who seeks to prove that "the primary and ubiquitous principle in Reynolds' aesthetic

system is the contrariety of universal and particular."⁴

Reynolds admits finding in the course of his research into aesthetics many established precepts and rules "which did not seem to me altogether reconcileable with each other, yet each seemed in itself to have the same claim of being supported by truth and nature" (D 227). But Reynolds also maintains the possibility of resolving such apparent paradoxes by viewing them in the light of the primary principle of his aesthetic system, that of general nature:

To clear away those difficulties, and reconcile those contrary opinions, it became necessary to distinguish the greater truth, as it may be called, from the lesser truth; the larger and more liberal idea of nature from the more narrow and confined. (D 227)

When Reynolds refers to the "greater truth," or to the "larger and more liberal idea of nature" which is conceived by and addressed to the imagination, he is speaking of general nature, a term indefinable by any method other than that of dialectic. In Hipple's estimation,

whether the discourse is of nature or art, of invention or imitation, of subject or style, of taste or genius, the analysis proceeds in a dialectic of the one and the many, the changeless and the transient. The distinction of general and particular is the constant analytic device, and universality the invariable criterion of excellence.⁵

Hipple also acknowledges Reynolds' intellectual debt to Platonic dialectic, but argues that Plato and Reynolds nevertheless differ on points so essential as to leave little doubt that Reynolds' system of thought is entirely his own:

Plato's system did not encourage the demarcation of an aesthetic realm which could be

treated in detail apart from moral, social, and theological consideration; and Plato's reference was ultimately to a reality existing independently of the mind. Reynolds . . . treats the work of art, its subject, its producer, and its critic in a world of discourse largely divided off from other matters; and the unchanging, the universal, the Nature to which he appeals is contingent upon the faculties and functions of the mind--human nature rather than cosmic nature is the source of his philosophic principles.⁶

A brief discussion of the method of dialectic is vital to an understanding of what Reynolds means by "general nature," his central aesthetic principle, which first and foremost does not (as it does in Platonic thought) represent something supermundane and separate from the mind, for only in the mind does the idea of general nature exist at all, and only through dialectical inquiry does Reynolds say we can come to know it. Nowhere in the Discourses does Reynolds attempt to define general nature in isolation--to do so would be to go against his own methodology, and thereby thwart the specific and desired purpose of dialectical argument. Hipple explains that

The peculiar virtue and merit of a Platonic system of criticism consists in the flexibility which permits their analogical application to a great range of subjects and the consequent isolation in the subjects of the universal traits or "ideas" to which the terms refer. If it be asked, how can undefined terms isolate anything? the reply must be, that each such term receives definition in each particular context by comparison with and opposition to other terms of the system; in each application the meaning of the term emerges from its use in the argument, the "dialectic."⁷

Thus, in order to approach Reynolds' idea of general nature in his own terms, we must examine within his system the interre-

lation of those ideas signified by such terms as "ideal beauty," "truth," "genius," and "imagination," and especially their opposition to or contrast with those of "deformity," "sense," "minuteness," and "accident," all of which refer to particular nature, the contrary of Reynolds' highest aesthetic principle.

In addition to establishing a method for the reconciliation of what he saw as contrary aesthetic opinions, Reynolds' distinction between "greater" and "lesser" truths gave him one basic line of argument to which any problem could be referred. Involved in this notion of greater truth are the concepts of ideal nature and ideal beauty; indeed, with reference to Reynolds' system as a whole, "the True, the Good, and the Beautiful become, when perfected, equivalent: all are Nature."⁸ "This idea of the perfect state of nature, which the artist calls the ideal beauty," writes Reynolds, "is the great leading principle, by which works of genius are conducted" (D 30). Always careful to align this "great leading principle" with an idea and not the productions of nature, Reynolds claims that the pursuit of art must take place in the human rather than divine realm: "This great ideal perfection and beauty are not to be sought in the heavens, but upon earth. They are about us, and upon every side of us" (D 29). Indeed, the idea of general nature will alone enable the artist to judge, or to arrive at some understanding of God's will by way of an examination of the forms of His works:

This is the idea [general nature] which has acquired, and which seems to have a right to the epithet of divine; as it may be said to preside, like a supreme judge, over all the productions of nature; appearing to be possessed of the will and intention of the Creator, as far as they regard the external form of living beings. (D 30)

External forms, then, belong to the category of lesser truth, whereas the idea of form, or of ideal beauty which is the perfect state of nature, belongs to the greater. Here Reynolds' argument rests on the assumption that the will or intention of the divine Creator, exhibited in the created forms of nature, is to model each of them upon some one perfect pattern--the "central form"--which may be induced from a comparison of the actual, imperfect productions with one another. The Ideal, or central form, therefore, can be known only through repeated comparisons of external forms, or through an examination of the Real: "Thus it is from a reiterated experience, and a close comparison of the objects in nature, that an artist becomes possessed of the idea of that central form . . . from which every deviation is deformity" (D 30). Such assumptions point to the empirical foundation of Reynolds' system; indeed, "Experience," he says, "is all in all" (D 29). At this point, we can see that the Discourses advocate the aesthetic pursuit of an ideal, called general nature, which is approached through a process of comparison and judgment of the phenomena of the real world, and realized in art by the expression of a purely mental perception of the "central form."

According to Reynolds, the idea of general nature which raises art above the level of a merely mechanical technique

is, strictly speaking, something apprehended only by the imagination, although the imagination must never operate in isolation, but always along with the other faculties of the mind. Nevertheless, the "great end of the art is to strike the imagination" (D 42), and it must accomplish this by capturing "that perfect form," which in turn entails the artist's "leaving out particularities, and retaining only general ideas" (D 39). In other words, only general nature in art will strike the imagination as ideally beautiful.

In the practice of art, Reynolds claims, "every thing is to be done with which it is natural for the mind to be pleased" (D 102); and he warns the prospective artist that "he who thinks nature, in the narrow sense of the word, is alone to be followed, will produce but a scanty entertainment for the imagination" (D 102). The "narrow sense" of the word "nature" refers of course to the phenomenal world which is perceived by the senses; Reynolds' higher sense of the word is again "the general idea of nature," although this latter term comprehends the former within it. Hence, Reynolds calls general nature "what is truly nature" (D 99). Of the two erroneous opinions that Reynolds considers most injurious to the artist, one is "that of taking particular living objects for nature" (D 106). Speaking elsewhere of taste, he goes on to say that true aesthetic taste, or the recognition of ideal beauty, "does not belong so much to the external form of things, but is addressed to the mind, and depends on its original frame, or, to use the expression, the organization of the soul; I mean

the imagination and the passions" (D 106). Similar to his distinction between "greater" and "lesser" truth, then, is Reynolds' view that there is "a larger and more liberal idea of nature [distinct] from the more narrow and confined; that which addresses itself to the imagination, from that which is solely addressed to the eye" (D 227). First there is the phenomenal world of nature, comprised of real objects having their relation to the senses of man; and then there is the larger idea of what is "truly nature" which "comprehends not only the forms which nature produces, but also the nature and internal fabrick and organization . . . of the human mind" (D 99).

Truth and nature together comprise the idea of general nature on which Reynolds bases his central and highest aesthetic principle: it may be conceived of as including within its scope both objective and mental reality, and it specifically pertains to the realm of aesthetics, for the artist, who possesses the idea, is alone capable of imitating objective reality in such a way as to arouse or excite the passions of the mind--particularly the imagination--of the spectator:

The great end of all those arts is, to make an impression on the imagination and the feeling. The imitation of nature frequently does this. Sometimes it fails, and something else succeeds. I think therefore the true test of all the arts, is not solely whether the production is a true copy of nature, but whether it answers the end of art, which is to produce a pleasing effect upon the mind. (D 204)

"In short," says Reynolds, "whatever pleases has in it what is analogous to the mind, and is therefore, in the highest and best sense of the word, natural" (D 102).

Furthermore, such mental pleasures proceed not only from viewing a faithful or happy imitation of the "central forms" of the phenomenal world, but also from a delight in such strictly abstract qualities as "simplicity or variety, uniformity or irregularity" (D 102) which are referable to nothing but the activity of the mind. This delight in art is even the result of a deviation on occasion from "common nature" for the sake of gratifying the nature of the mind. Reynolds explains this aspect of the aesthetic response, using poetry to illustrate his point:

The very existence of poetry depends on the licence it assumes of deviating from actual nature, in order to gratify natural propensities by other means. . . . there is another principle in the human mind, to which the work must be referred, which still renders it more artificial, carries it still further from common nature, and deviates only to render it more perfect. That principle is the sense of congruity, coherence, and consistency, which is a real existing principle in man; and it must be gratified. (D 197)

The artist, Reynolds believes, must direct his "attention to an intimate acquaintance with the passions and affections of the mind" since "art effects its purpose by their means" (D 137). Again, his model of the mind is essentially empirical: just as he distinguishes between the objective and subjective attributes of the idea of general nature, when he comes to treat the subjective alone, that is, when he refers to the mind itself, he distinguishes between what can be known by sense experience, and what can be apprehended solely by the imaginative faculty. And once again, the sensuous aspect of the aesthetic experience refers to the narrow idea of nature

while "the imagination is here the residence of truth" (D 192).

In the same way that the idea of the central form of the object an artist seeks to represent "seems to have a right to the epithet of divine" (D 30), the aesthetic idea of general nature, which addresses itself to the desires of the mind and not to its sensuous response or aspect, is somehow allied to the "divine" in man, divine because not bound to or limited by the objective world as are the senses: "these arts, in their highest province, are not addressed to the gross senses, but to the desires of the mind, to that spark of divinity which we have within, impatient of being circumscribed and pent up by the world which is about us" (D 207). Despite this "spark of divinity," however, in Reynolds' view the mind remains empirically tied to the world and to the senses, at least insofar as "the imagination is incapable of producing any thing originally of itself, and can only vary and combine those ideas with which it is furnished by means of the senses" (D 107); or insofar as "invention, strictly speaking, is little more than a new combination of those images which have been previously gathered and deposited in the memory: nothing can come of nothing: he who has laid up no materials, can produce no combinations" (D 15-16).

But, just as the idea of general nature is formed by examining the classes and species of objects amongst which there resides a central form always perceptible to the discriminating mind or to reason, so does there exist a common principle in the minds of men which is indicative of general

nature:

We have no reason to suspect there is a greater difference between our minds than between our forms; of which, though there are no two alike, yet there is a general similitude that goes through the whole race of mankind; and those who have cultivated their taste can distinguish what is beautiful or deformed, or, in other words, what agrees with or deviates from the general idea of nature, in one case, as well as in the other. (D 107)

Since the "internal fabrick of our minds, as well as the external form of our bodies, [are] nearly uniform" (D 107), it follows that the examination and comparison of mental phenomena will again lead to the idea or principle of general nature. Reynolds argues that the mind or human nature can be known only through an empirical process: "A knowledge of the disposition and character of the human mind can be acquired only by experience" (D 107). "We may therefore conclude," writes Reynolds, "that there are certain and regular causes by which the imagination and passions of men are affected; and that the knowledge of these causes is acquired by a laborious and diligent investigation of nature" (D 109). Such knowledge is required in order for the artist to approach and perfect his idea of general nature as it manifests itself in the human realm. For both mental and physical phenomena, the aesthetic pursuit is the same.

However, as noted above, the imagination plays the key role in the aesthetic process: it is to that faculty of mind that the idea of general nature is addressed, and from it proceeds the artist's conception of ideal beauty. And yet, empirical knowledge is an indispensable part of the formation

of this conception, since the artist must know what is in fact common and uniform in the minds of men. The imagination, therefore, must be directed, though not controlled, by reason, which is the distinguishing power, throughout the aesthetic experience and the creative process. Hence Reynolds declares, "In the midst of the highest flights of fancy or imagination, reason ought to preside from first to last" (D 118). Only the imagination possesses that affinity for or with the idea of general nature which is needed to give expression to it. And since the imaginative power's mode of operation is forward-moving, it appears to resist boundaries and limits: "we need not be mortified or discouraged at not being able to execute the conceptions of a romantick imagination. Art has its boundaries, though imagination has none" (D 59). Nature, too, is "infinitely various" (D 190) and limitless; and the artistic imagination which neglects a "continual recourse to her" (D 190) or fails to operate along with reason in such recourse will produce inventions which are "more like the dreams of a distempered brain than the exalted enthusiasm of a sound and true genius" (D 118).

From what has been thus far said, it appears clear that the imagination, whether as a vehicle for the desires of the mind, or as a mental power operating in the process of invention, is Reynolds' prime mover in the pursuit of an aesthetic ideal of general nature. Its powers are boundless and incapable of self-restraint; hence, it explores and delights in whatever is infinite and various in nature. Still, according

to Reynolds, the imagination can never be original because it can only work with images derived from sense experience. And so, if the imagination is to remain true to nature--and this is the only sense in which Reynolds will allow it to be true--its powers must not falsely combine those images upon which it depends, nor invent what could never reflect reality. For this reason, Reynolds repeatedly cautions the budding artist "against the false opinion, but too prevalent among artists, of the imaginary powers of native genius" (D 91). Imitation, which Reynolds defines as "the means, and not the end, of art" (D 147), cannot be entirely forsaken by the artist: "I am on the contrary persuaded," Reynolds says, "that by imitation only, variety, and even originality of invention, is produced. I will go further; even genius, at least what generally is so called, is the child of imitation" (D 74).

Reynolds' argument here is another variation on his central tenet that the Ideal must be sought in the Real, and it explains why he warns the artist not to quit the service of nature, "whose service, when well understood, is perfect freedom" (D 190). And this view also explains why the imagination is the faculty par excellence in the aesthetic experience: the artist may direct the limitless power of his imagination toward the pursuit of the Ideal, and, when aided by the empirical faculty of reason, it will seek that Ideal in the real world where it in fact resides. Like general nature itself, which is not divorced from the reality of mental and physical

phenomena but rather comprehends or subsumes them, the imagination is able to rise above its rather humble beginnings in sense experience without denying that heritage; indeed, any attempt to do so, from Reynolds' point of view, is madness. Like most eighteenth-century thinkers, Reynolds advocates the middle way: "As our art is not a divine gift, so neither is it a mechanical trade" (D 92). Reynolds' own summation of his position perhaps best expresses the resolution of these paradoxes of the aesthetic pursuit of the Ideal in the Real, and of the pursuing mind as both free and bound at one and the same time:

Perhaps there is no higher proof of the excellency of man than this,--that to a mind properly cultivated whatever is bounded is little. The mind is continually labouring to advance, step by step, through successive gradations of excellence, towards perfection, which is dimly seen, at a great though not hopeless distance, and which we must always follow because we never can attain; but the pursuit rewards itself: one truth teaches another, and our store is always encreasing, though nature can never be exhausted. Our art, like all arts which address the imagination, is applied to somewhat a lower faculty of the mind, which approaches nearer to sensuality; but through sense and fancy it must make its way to reason; for such is the progress of thought, that we perceive by sense, we combine by fancy, and distinguish by reason: and without carrying our art out of its natural and true character, the more we purify it from every thing that is gross in sense, in that proportion we advance its use and dignity; and in proportion as we lower it to mere sensuality, we pervert its nature, and degrade it from the rank of a liberal art. (D 143)

Art, says Reynolds, ought to be "in many points of view, and strictly speaking, no imitation at all of external nature" (D 195); it must instead refer always to "the eternal and

immutable nature of things" (D 191).

Early on in the Discourses Reynolds states his opinion that "all the arts receive their perfection from an ideal beauty, superior to what is to be found in individual nature" (D 27). He later defines this "ideal beauty" more fully, returning once again in his dialectic to the terms "general" and "intellectual" :

The art which we profess has beauty for its object; this it is our business to discover and to express; but the beauty of which we are in quest is general and intellectual; it is an idea that subsists only in the mind; the sight never beheld it, nor has the hand expressed it: it is an idea residing in the breast of the artist, which he is always labouring to impart, and which he dies at last without imparting; but which he is yet so far able to communicate, as to raise the thoughts, and extend the views of the spectator; and which, by a succession of art, may be so far diffused, that its effects may extend themselves imperceptibly into publick benefits, and be among the means of bestowing on whole nations refinement of taste: which, if it does not lead directly to purity of manners, obviates at least their greatest depravation, by disentangling the mind from appetite, and conducting the thoughts through successive stages of excellence, till that contemplation of universal rectitude and harmony which began by taste, may, as it is exalted and refined, conclude in virtue. (D 143-44)

The first definition of ideal beauty, as something superior to what is found in individual nature, corresponds again to Reynolds' dictum that, with regard to the aesthetic representation of the phenomenal world of nature, the central form is essentially independent of particular objects. The second quotation defines ideal beauty with respect to the mind and its attendant desires and passions. The only fundamental difference between these two definitions, since in them

the description of the process of discovery and expression is the same, lies in the assertion of the second that beauty will elevate the mind to an idea of virtue. We need only recall Reynolds' explanation of the imagination as being allied to the senses and yet free of them to follow his argument that the idea of general beauty will end in a movement away from sensual pleasures toward those of a higher, nobler, and more virtuous order:

As the senses, in the lowest state of nature, are necessary to direct us to our support, when that support is once secure there is danger in following them further; to him who has no rule of action but the gratification of the senses, plenty is always dangerous: it is therefore necessary to the security of society, that the mind should be elevated to the idea of general beauty, and the contemplation of general truth; by this pursuit the mind is always carried forward in search of something more excellent than it finds, and obtains its proper superiority over the common senses of life, by learning to feel itself capable of higher aims and nobler enjoyments. In this gradual exaltation of human nature, every art contributes its contingent towards the general supply of mental pleasure. Whatever abstracts the thoughts from sensual gratifications, whatever teaches us to look for happiness within ourselves, must advance in some measure the dignity of our nature. (D 142-43)

But Reynolds reminds us that the ideas of general beauty and general truth are at bottom identical, mainly because "the natural appetite or taste of the human mind is for truth" (D 97) and anything which strikes the mind as beautiful must also be true and in conformity with those principles which have "unalterable and fixed foundations in nature" (D 97). Reynolds' understanding is that beauty must be experienced upon certain, discoverable principles; otherwise, it would be simply the

result of chance, and the pursuit of art would be rendered an absurdity: "Every thing which is wrought with certainty, is wrought upon some principle. If it is not, it cannot be repeated" (D 31).

Reynolds' warning that the artist should not derive his ideas from "particular nature" alone stems from his unwillingness to equate objective and subjective realities, and from his desire to maintain a distinction between what is purely mental and what is purely material. Art, in its highest sense, partakes of both and must be true to both, despite its inability to encompass the whole of either. The artist must above all reduce "the variety of nature to the abstract idea" (D 32). Therefore, Reynolds denounces particular nature on the very same grounds that he praises the general: anything particular, or peculiar to the individual, cannot possibly share in what is true and beautiful for all men. "Particularities," Reynolds argues, "cannot be nature: for how can that be the nature of man, in which no two individuals are the same?" (D 100). And so, Reynolds calls whatever is unique, whatever cannot be repeated in art in conformity to the infinitely variable principles of general nature, an "accident," "defect," or "deformity":

Peculiarities in the works of art, are like those in the human figure; it is by them that we are cognizable and distinguished one from another, but they are always so many blemishes; which, however, both in real life and in painting, cease to appear deformities, to those who have them continually before their eyes. In the works of art, even the most enlightened mind, when warmed by beauties of the highest kind, will by degrees find a repugnance within

him to acknowledge any defects; nay, his enthusiasm will carry him so far, as to transform them into beauties, and objects of imitation. (D 81)

On the highest level of Reynolds' aesthetic system, sense experience alone remains narrow and peculiar, for the artistic rendering of it will address only a part of the whole of human nature:

If deceiving the eye were the only business of the art, there is no doubt, indeed, but the minute painter would be more apt to succeed: but it is not the eye, it is the mind, which the painter of genius desires to address; nor will he waste a moment upon those smaller objects, which only serve to catch the sense, to divide the attention, and to counteract his great design of speaking to the heart. (D 35)

Reynolds assures us, however, that he is "not recommending a neglect of the detail" and that he is "well aware that a judicious detail will sometimes give the force of truth to the work" (D 165); but argues nevertheless in favour of "the true distinction between essential and subordinate powers" (D 165). "The general idea constitutes real excellence," he writes, and "all smaller things, however perfect in their way, are to be sacrificed without mercy to the greater" (D 41). Besides, "it is true in taste, that many little things will not make a great one. The sublime impresses the mind at once with one great idea" (D 48), for which reason Reynolds values the "comprehensive faculty" of the creative mind as "an instance of that superiority with which mind predominates over matter, by contracting into one whole what nature has made multifarious" (D 170). The artist's ability to express his subject "as a whole" Reynolds calls "the genius of mechanical per-

formance" (D 160), and this type of genius, moreover, expresses the subject "so that the general effect and power of the whole may take possession of the mind, and for a while suspend the consideration of the subordinate and particular beauties or defects" (D 160).

To sum up, the idea of general nature--and it is an idea only, never to be comprehended or attained completely as it is greater than any single mind and greater than phenomenal nature--is to Reynolds perfect beauty in the natural sphere and perfect truth in the human. Indeed, it is both together.

NOTES

¹ Walter J. Hipple, Jr., "General and Particular in the Discourses of Sir Joshua Reynolds: A Study in Method," Journal of Aesthetics & Art Criticism, 11 (March, 1953), 241.

² Lipking, p. 181.

³ Hipple, p. 243.

⁴ Hipple, p. 234.

⁵ Hipple, p. 234.

⁶ Hipple, p. 234.

⁷ Hipple, p. 239.

⁸ Walter J. Hipple, Jr., The Beautiful, The Sublime, & The Picturesque in Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetic Theory (Carbondale: The Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1957), p. 138.

Unlike Reynolds, who confessed a "disposition to reduce all that I observed and felt in my own mind, to method and system" (D 227), William Blake had no desire to meddle with philosophic or aesthetic systems. Theoretical constructs of any kind would naturally be anathema to someone who asks, as Blake did, "What has Reasoning to do with the Art of Painting?" (MG 636). This rhetorical question, however, does not imply that Blake advocated a mindless, indifferent, or solipsistic attitude toward the creative process; nor does it mean that he refused to acknowledge the artist's need for aesthetic principles. On the contrary, Blake repeatedly expounds ideas of art which are "definite and determinate," not vague; individualistic and particular, not subjective. What Blake's exclusion of reasoning from the realm of art does mean is that anyone who seeks to abstract a conventionally reasoned system of aesthetics from the Blakean canon will be doomed ultimately to frustrate his own efforts.

It may be relevant to point out that the profusion of strongly, often cryptically expressed ideas throughout Blake's writings gives the impression that he does in fact wield an idiosyncratic system of thought which branches out into theories not only of painting and poetics, but of politics, religion, philosophy, and science as well. In support of this view, it is tempting to quote the figure of Los in Jerusalem as a spokesman for Blake himself: "I must Create a System, or be

enslav'd by another Mans" (J 10:20). All this is indeed true and applicable to Blake's aesthetics, but only as far as it goes. There is one major qualification to be made which radically alters the entire picture: insofar as Blake can be said to wield such a system, the sole purpose of it is to controvert and overturn the repressive nature of systematic thinking in all its forms. The process of the Blakean system is anti-rational not irrational, its goal a mental balance between the rational and superrational, as the subsequent line of Los's remark suggests: "I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to Create" (J 10:21); it is, in a word, anti-system. The full poetic context of Los's statement depicts him "Striving with Systems to deliver Individuals from those Systems" (J 11:5) and "fixing their [Albion's Sons'] Systems, permanent: by mathematic power/Giving a body to Falshood that it may be cast off for ever" (J 12:12-13). Los's striving is designed to unleash the individual reader's thinking from the conventional patterns or "body" of all philosophical systems of thought, and so his system must strike at their common root, the inflexibility of reason and insufficiency of logic. All systems--whether those of Bacon, Newton, Locke, or Reynolds--are "fixed" by Los rather than being opposed or refuted as isolated, independent units; in other words, Los's aim, or Blake's aim, is to show how the process of logical thought becomes caught in a web of inadequate conclusions, inadequate because they raise questions they cannot answer while remaining dependent for their own proof upon unprovable premises.¹

Los's anti-system, calculated to give "a body to Fals-hood," that is, to structure whatever is contrary to truth in a clearly recognizable form, is--like Blake's--verbal, intellectualized, and consequently full of thought and ideas, else it could never communicate the truth of vision which the whole of both Los's and Blake's work is designed to reveal. But there is a sense in which words, as fixed structures, pose an insoluble problem for the visionary, since they are always liable to be mistaken, in Northrop Frye's phrase, as "something solidified and crustacean,"² or else as semantic keys to just another system of ideas. Hence in Jerusalem we see the poet-prophet Los using "English, the rough basement" to build "the stubborn structure of the Language, acting against/Albions melancholy, who must else have been a Dumb despair" (J 36:58-60). Blake as poet could no more remain "dumb" than Los could cease from his labours, and so his artistic dilemma came to be centered on the paradox of creating a system which would deliver his reader from all systems, of speaking to him in a language which would point beyond all verbal structures.

In comparing the aesthetic views of Blake and Reynolds on the subject of the general versus the particular, it would be pointless to expect the same sort of systematic coherence, the same rational orderliness of thought, from the former that we find in the latter. Moreover, before we can discuss Blake's aesthetic opinions of Reynolds' Discourses, we will first have to show that they relate to his principles, which, taken

as a whole, reveal a consistency of another kind. As Frye notes, "Consistency . . . foolish or otherwise, is one of Blake's chief preoccupations, just as 'self-contradiction' is always one of his most contemptuous comments."³ Indeed, "Self-Contradictory" is one of the insults Blake often hurls at Reynolds in his annotations to the Discourses, and it is uttered in the same unmistakable tone of contempt as those of "A Lie," "A Mock," "Villainy," and "What Falshood."

But Blake himself never uses the word "consistency" anywhere in his writings, and "consistent" appears only twice, both times in his letters.⁴ "Self-contradicting," on the other hand, he uses once in Jerusalem,⁵ and "self-contradiction" twice in two separate poems⁶ where it appears in identical lines; and in his annotations, variant forms of the phrase appear six times,⁷ four of these being accusations directed at Reynolds. The poetic instances of "self-contradiction" are found alongside "doubt," and "self-contradicting" appears as an adjective which modifies "agony." In the prose, variant forms of the phrase are grammatically joined to the expressions "Truth & Falshood Jumbled Together" (MG 633), "Equivocation," "Knavery," or "False." On two more occasions, Blake accuses Reynolds of plain "contradiction,"⁸ or says that his statements "contradict" one another.⁹ At no time, however, does Blake call Reynolds "inconsistent"; in fact, he uses that word only twice, again in his letters.¹⁰

It is clear from the above that Blake sees Reynolds as contradictory either in himself, in his statements, or in both;

but we cannot assume that he is tacitly rebuking Reynolds for inconsistency in the same breath. The terms "inconsistent" and "contradictory" are not always synonymous, and can in fact mean quite different things, "contradictory" carrying connotations of "opposition," "contrary to," and "denial of truth" which "inconsistent" does not have. This distinction further suggests that we cannot assume Blake was unable to see or ignored the internal coherence and consistency of Reynolds' dialectical argument in the Discourses. Through an examination of Blake's usage of "self-contradiction" or its variants as they appear throughout his poetry and prose, we will be better able to discover his precise meaning for and perhaps consistent use of the term.

In the two following, nearly identical couplets, "self-contradiction" is most closely aligned in syntax with "doubt":

Two Horn'd Reasoning Cloven Fiction
In Doubt which is Self contradiction (KG 265);

Reasoning upon its own dark Fiction
In doubt which is Self Contradiction (EG 512).

As above, "doubt" appears elsewhere in Blake in tandem with "reasoning."¹¹ The term "fiction" is similarly associated here with "reasoning," although the syntactical differences between the two couplets give rise to semantic ambiguities. In the second case, the "fiction" is definitely something possessed, but the identity of the possessor is unclear since the couplet in isolation does not give any positive information as to the subject of the possessive pronoun "its." Possibly we are intended to see the "fiction" as arising from "reasoning" as

its product or result. In the first couplet, on the other hand, the "fiction" appears to be set in apposition to "reasoning," an interpretation supported by the similarity in grammatical function and syntactic position of the words "Two Horn'd" and "Cloven," both of which carry demonic overtones and the sense of separation or splitting. Thus, the "fiction" may either be identical to "reasoning," or belong to it, or both. This in turn raises the possibility that "self-contradiction" is linguistically equivalent in both couplets to "doubt" only, or in the first couplet to any combination of the three major parts of speech which precede it. Within this lie further semantic possibilities stemming from the complete lack of punctuation in the couplets, and from their unorthodox capitalization, both of which allow for differences in emphasis on almost every word. The prospect of our arriving at a simple definition of "self-contradiction" on the basis of these two couplets alone--although they provide all the poetic and two of the total of nine instances of the word throughout Blake's work--does not appear in the offing.

In any event, "self-contradiction" must, along with "doubt," be allied to "reasoning," and we may now safely assume that logical consistency--the mental discipline of logic being an activity of reason--could not possibly be of any concern to Blake, unless we draw the absurd conclusion that he prizes the concepts of self-contradiction or doubt, and values fictions, "dark" or "cloven." But the remaining possibility that Blake condemns the power of reason seems somewhat problematic, for

until we examine his use of the term "reasoning" we cannot know exactly why he repudiates it.

In Milton Blake speaks of "Two Contraries & the Reasoning Negative" (M 5:14), then says that "Contraries are Positives A Negation is not a Contrary" (M 30). In Jerusalem we find that "Negations are not Contraries: Contraries mut[u]ally Exist:/But Negations Exist Not" (J 17:33-34); and "reasoning" is more fully defined as "the Reasoning Power/An Abstract objecting power, that Negatives every thing/This is the Spectre of Man: the Holy Reasoning Power" (J 10:13-15). Thus, "reasoning" is clearly an abstract power which "objects" and "negatives." If we consider these last two terms as verbs, we can see that both are potential puns on their noun forms; and if we admit that possibility, the puns too may be significant to our attempt to define "reasoning." The noun "negative," at least, we have already identified as being modified by the adjective "reasoning," and we also first came across the related noun "negation" in a line which strongly suggests, by a similar syntactical contrast with "contrary," the semantic as well as grammatical kinship between "negation" and "reasoning negative" in Blake's poetry. As a verb or noun, "negative" is probably being used by Blake to signify an act and a thing at once; this makes the pun on the word likely indeed, since "negation," "negative," and "reasoning" are increasingly turning up as interrelated, even interchangeable terms. However, the pun on the word "object"--or as it appears in Blake's definition of the reasoning power, the verbal "objecting"--

cannot be established with the same degree of certainty as yet. At any rate, Blake sums up this entire concept of the reasoning power in the phrase "reasoning negative." We are further told that "Negations Exist Not: Exceptions & Objections & Unbeliefs/Exist not: nor shall they ever be Organized for ever & ever" (J 17:34-35); but a line from Milton, which states that "The Negation must be destroyd to redeem the Contraries" (M 40:33), renders this notion of the nonexistence of negations completely ambiguous, since we must question how something which does not exist can be destroyed.

At the risk of confusing the issue, we must define one other Blakean term, the "contrary." The most detailed explanation of the word is found in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell: "Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence" (MHH 3). Elsewhere, we find that contraries are "call'd Qualities, with which/Every Substance is clothed" (J 10:8-9), that "There is a place where Contrarities are equally true" (J 48:14), and that there are also "Two bleeding Contraries equally true" (J 24:3). Again, our attempt at definition raises more questions than it answers, for we do not know what Blake means by "quality," "substance," or "contrarities," nor do we know where contraries may be said to be equally true. By now, we may begin to feel Blake's determination to "cast off the idiot Questioner who is always questioning,/But never capable of answering; who sits with a sly grin/Silent plotting when to question, like a thief in a cave" (M 41:12-14).

Rather than following any of these unexplored paths, I will return to the "reasoning negative," which now appears to be identical to or the cause of a fiction or negation that does not exist though it is distinct from a contrary, which is positive and exists. Furthermore, the reasoning power is abstract, while it negates, objects, and operates in doubt, this doubt being part and parcel of our original term, "self-contradiction."

We may now assume (though we cannot be certain) that if Blake accuses Reynolds of self-contradiction, he is saying that Reynolds is in doubt while reasoning, because reasoning is a power which "negatives" everything, that is, puts things out of existence--including itself--by producing a fiction or negation identical to it which is in fact nonexistent. From Blake's point of view, then, Reynolds may simply be contradicting his own existence, that is himself, solely by the use of reason. But until we have more information it is impossible to determine this, nor can we tell whether Blake is suggesting that Reynolds does not exist, that Reynolds does not exist only when he reasons, that he does not exist when he negates the existence of something Blake believes exists, or when he negates the existence of simply anything, even if only existence itself. These are, moreover, only a few of the logical possibilities which could be explored. Clearly, if we want to know whether or not Blake saw the consistency of Reynolds' arguments, to do him any justice at all we would have to discover exactly what he means by "contradiction" through a process of dialectic-

tical argument much like Reynolds' own, one which would permit us to define any given term by examining its relation to context and to each term associated with it. And if we want to understand the whole of Blake's argument against Reynolds' aesthetic theories, we should know what he means by "A Lie," "A Mock," and "Falshood" as well.

And yet, modern critics of the controversy, perhaps finding Blake's tone of contempt unsettling or puzzling, seem to feel compelled to defend Reynolds' aesthetic system and dialectical methods against the viciousness of Blake's attack. Says Frederic Will, for example:

The apparent inconsistencies of Reynolds' thought can frequently be shown to be the results of the changing focus in which Reynolds views his concepts (beauty, truth, nature) in terms of their generality or particularity. This suppleness in Reynolds' thought, familiar to readers of his Discourses, may suggest, from the outset, the likelihood that Blake has done Reynolds some injustice, and certainly distorted him somewhat, in setting Reynolds up as a monolithic antagonist of Blake's own theories.¹²

Similarly, Herbert Wright warns that "the reader who received without cavil Blake's judgment on Reynolds's Discourses would carry away an impression very unfavourable to the older man,"¹³ and that Blake "approached the Discourses not as an objective critic, but as a passionate partisan."¹⁴ Again, Edgar Wind's view is that in the quarrel between Reynolds and Blake, "it is the academician, Reynolds, who opposes pedantry, while Blake, who extols the visionary powers of the imagination, is prompted by his very frenzy to be rigid. How is that to be explained?"¹⁵ All three of these critics find the explanation for Blake's

vehemence in either his supposed refusal to acknowledge the internal coherence of the Discourses, or in the polar opposition of the two painters' aesthetic "systems" or theories. Wind claims that

what angered and embittered [Blake] about Reynolds' career was that it rested on a method directly opposite to his own. And the Discourses contained the rationale of that method: they recommended a prudence which Blake abhorred, and declined the risks of genius to which Blake was committed.¹⁶

In Wright's opinion, Blake's "attitude to Reynolds is based on a deep-rooted antagonism in their artistic creeds."¹⁷ Finally, Will's article seeks to prove that

In order . . . to score his points against Reynolds, Blake willingly ignores the significance of the context of thought in which Reynolds thinks about art. Thus even though Blake, rightly, sees that Reynolds is his antagonist on certain basic issues, Blake will not imagine that Reynolds may be presenting, less than perfectly, certain valid concerns of aesthetic theory which Blake's own view of art does not account for.¹⁸

Only Lawrence Lipking appears to recognize that "Blake does not reason with Reynolds."¹⁹

Although there are elements of truth in what Wright, Will, and Wind have to say about Blake, I would argue that Blake does not ignore the context of Reynolds' aesthetic thought; that he has no rational theory or system of aesthetics himself; that, far from claiming to be an "objective" critic of Reynolds, he views the notions of both subjectivity and objectivity as absurd; and finally that while the method of Blake's career may have indeed been opposite to Reynolds' (this is a question I will not ask), the method of their "systems" of aesthetic

thought is similar in at least one respect. Both use a dialectical method of argument in the presentation of their ideas, although Blake's dialectic--like his anti-system--is directly opposed to Reynolds' in that it ultimately self-destructs by frustrating the reasoning process of argument and turning logic back in upon itself. And yet, logic is certainly one of the viable inroads into Blake's system, as Hazard Adams points out:

When the string has been wound into a ball, Blake's thought emerges in a rational system, as much a logical extension of the thought of his time as, for instance, Berkeley's, but an extension contrived to move man out and beyond the eighteenth century "endless maze" of "dark disputes and artful teasing." True, Blake's system is based upon intuition or imagination, but it is not therefore dissolved anarchically in logical inconsistency.²⁰

The only possible method by which to test the truth of these assertions about Blake's system is one he himself openly despises--experiment, another term he links with "doubt" (EG 511). That is, I will attempt to define the concepts relevant to Blake's criticisms of Reynolds in his own terms, which may be the only way to avoid twisting them, and to reconstruct his system by using a simple and admittedly inadequate form of logic to draw conclusions from the premises Blake himself postulates, either in his poetry, prose, or marginalia. The use of any axiomatic statement Blake makes in his marginalia I feel is justified by the fact that in the Discourses annotations (and others) he speaks directly to a reader.²¹ I will also try to provide some explanation for Blake's setting Reynolds up as a "monolithic antagonist" of

his own aesthetic theories, which distortion of Reynolds is plainly confessed in his opening set of remarks on the first Discourse: "Whether Reynolds. knew what he was doing. is nothing to me; the Mischief is just the same, whether a Man does it Ignorantly or Knowingly" (MG 631). Finally, and most importantly, my analysis will reveal that Blake's judgment of Reynolds is entirely in keeping with his practice as well as theories of art.

On the title page of his copy of the Discourses Blake wrote, "This Man was Hired to Depress Art This is the opinion of Will Blake my Proofs of this Opinion are given in the following Notes" (MG 625). Later on he adds, "The Contradictions in Reynolds's Discourses are Strong Presumptions that they are the Work of Several Hands" (MG 628). (This remark refers to the then-extant rumour that Reynolds had more than his fair share of help from Johnson and Burke in the composition of his lectures.) Blake's note continues, "But this is no Proof that Reynolds did not Write them The Man Either Painter or Philosopher who Learns or Acquires all he Knows from Others. Must be full of Contradictions" (MG 628). Here Blake's view of knowledge implies that it must be independently acquired, at least to some degree, by the individual who wishes to avoid self-contradiction. A second epistemological view appears in a subsequent note: "Reason or A Ratio of All We have Known is not the Same it shall be when we know More. [Reynolds] therefore takes a Falshood for granted to set out with" (MG 649). The statement of Reynolds' which

provoked this particular remark of Blake's concerns, as we might expect, reason; Reynolds says of this faculty, "We will take it for granted, that reason is something invariable and fixed in the nature of things" (D 98). At this point, Blake takes issue with an aspect of Reynolds' epistemology--the nature of reason--which, we will recall from the foregoing discussion, is very much at variance with his own: not only does Blake discountenance Reynolds' view of reason as "something invariable and fixed in the nature of things," he considers reasoning a "cloven fiction," a self-divided, abstract nonentity. Reason as a faculty of mind--as opposed to reasoning--has not as yet been defined, and for the present I will only note that Blake does seem to allow its existence, since he equates it in both the Discourses annotations and "There is No Natural Religion" with "A Ratio of All We have Known" (NNR 2; MG 649). This definition, however, refers more specifically to Blake's theory of knowledge, and it is clear that epistemology (rarely left out of eighteenth-century discussions of aesthetics) is as important to Blake's aesthetics as it is to Reynolds'.

We will remember that Blake has claimed his annotations are proofs of his opinion (a word I will return to) that Reynolds was "hired to depress art." Two of these proofs, or opinions, are first that Reynolds is "full of contradictions," and second that he sets out by taking a "falsehood" for granted. As I have already argued, Blake's use of the word "contradiction" (or "self-contradiction") does not necessarily indicate that

he sees inconsistencies within Reynolds' thought; rather, it is likely that he sees reasoning. At one point, Blake shouts, "This is All Self-Contradictory! Truth & Falshood Jumbled Together" (MG 633), and he further accuses Reynolds of being "False" or uttering "Falshoods" a total of twelve times.²²

Blake never does define "false" or "falsehood" for us, which may not seem surprising, but he does give us several definitions of "truth" and one of "knowledge" which are noteworthy for their uniquely Blakean combination of ambiguity and certainty. This is the result of Blake's use of the declarative statement in the form of a philosophical axiom or paradoxical aphorism, both "axiom" and "aphorism" being terms which refer to principles, laws, or statements of truth, especially in eighteenth-century usage. Generally speaking, then, each of Blake's one-sentence definitions appears in a grammatical form equivalent to a positive assertion which is often formed by a combination of negative and positive assertions. But the semantic status of each such positive assertion is rendered uncertain by its also taking the form of either a paradoxical or a philosophical axiom which in itself provides no final or positive evidence or proof--that is, as a statement of fact or assertion of truth, it remains open to question. And since in the eighteenth century, philosophy sought to establish the laws or principles of both material and immaterial aspects of being, Blake's use of this grammatically positive yet philosophically questionable axiom may safely lead us to conclude that his definitions of words or ideas are intended to parody the

eighteenth-century conception of both the natural philosopher's "general law" and the moral philosopher's "general truth," which, paradoxically again, Blake's own philosophical system often equates. Indeed, the semantic ambiguity of Blake's definitions disappears only when they are read in terms of one another, and are accepted as literally true though philosophically doubtful or ambiguous; or else philosophical ambiguity need pose no problem at all if we simply accept Blake's statements as being literally--that is, with respect to both the meaning and form of the words--assertions of truth, and as being truly defined by one another. If we choose some alternate method of determining the "truth value" of Blake's statements, we must either remain content with their ambiguity, or else read them poetically. Our final alternatives are either to dismiss what Blake declares as untrue by denying or negating the truth of his maxim, aphorism, axiom, or assertion; or else not to trouble ourselves with questions of the truth or falsity of anything he says. "Negating," Blake has informed us, is an activity of reasoning, while the second act, of dismissing questions of truth and falsity altogether, is for Blake, as we will soon see, one of true perception. In Blake's terms, therefore, we as readers have four basic choices in our response to his declarations of truth: first, negating or remaining in doubt; second, believing (philosophically) or accepting (poetically); third, the unquestioning perception of meaning as we read; and fourth, not to read for meaning at all. These four choices correspond in Blake's mythology to four

states of mind: Ulro (no desire for truth), Generation (doubt or denial of truth, both of which involve reasoning), Beulah (an act of belief in or acceptance of truth), and finally, Eden (no questioning, only perception of truth).

To return to Blake's definitions, the one of the term "knowledge" states, "Knowledge is not by deduction but Immediate by Perception or Sense at once" (MG 653). This notion of the immediacy of perception dominates his definitions of "truth" as well:

Self Evident Truth is one Thing and Truth the result of Reasoning is another Thing (MG 610);

He who does not Know Truth at Sight is unworthy of Her Notice (MG 648);

as if Reasoning was of any Consequence to a Question Downright Plain Truth is Something but Reasoning is Nothing (MG 608);

No man can think write or speak from his heart, but he must intend truth (ARO 2);

Truth can never be told so as to be understood, and not be believ'd (MHH 36).

Clearly, to Blake's way of thinking whatever is true must be self-evidently so; that is, the truth of something is immediately recognizable and need not be questioned or inquired into by the reasoning mind. Blake's idea of falsity or falsehood, however, is still uncertain: it may be "truth the result of reasoning," but we can only assume this if we deduce it logically from the first premise quoted above, "Self Evident Truth is one Thing," by arguing that if self-evident truth is one thing, then the only thing it can be is itself. Therefore, if truth the result of reasoning is another thing, it

cannot be truth and hence must be falsehood.

However, Blake himself never makes this distinction, and there remains the possibility that truth the result of reasoning is neither truth nor falsehood. Indeed, elsewhere Blake defines "Rational Truth" as simply the "Root of Evil & Good" (KG 265); and he further posits a third category, "error," which is also distinguished from or in opposition to truth:

All Life consists of these Two Throwing
off Error < & Knives from our company >
continually & recieving Truth < or Wise
Men into our Company > Continually (VLJ 551);

whenever any Individual Rejects Error &
Embraces Truth a Last Judgment passes upon
that Individual (VLJ 551);

Error is Created Truth is Eternal (VLJ 555);

Truth has bounds. Error none (BL 4:30).

Blake also couples "error" with "illusion" in Jerusalem (J 35:27), and then equates it with "ignorance" in the Discourses annotations: "Genius has no Error it is Ignorance that is Error" (MG 641). Thus, it is also possible that when Blake speaks of falsehood he is actually referring to error, which, allied to illusion, is presumably ignorance of self-evident truth. Knowledge, as we have seen, results from the individual's immediate perception of this truth--which is why it cannot be safely acquired wholly or secondhand from others--and therefore reasoning, which Blake dismisses as "nothing," probably to suggest its nonexistence, is false because it leads to ignorance and error.

In sum, when Blake accuses Reynolds of a falsehood, he

may be arguing that Reynolds, perhaps purposefully, states the opposite of what is self-evidently true, or that he is in error because ignorant of what is self-evidently true. In either case, this falsehood must be the direct result of reasoning upon a question which requires none--no rational evidence whatever--to support its truth. Hence Blake says, "Error is Created Truth is Eternal," the implication being that reason creates error while truth simply and always exists. The notion of Reynolds' contradictions is now more intelligible: when Blake says Reynolds "jumbles truth and falsehood together" (a phrase which describes and explains the status of "exceptions" to truth which Blake defines as nonexistent products, like negations and fictions, of reasoning), he means that at one moment Reynolds reasons and the next speaks what is self-evidently true, or sometimes flounders in error because of reasoning and other times conveys knowledge which is "not by deduction [that is, reasoning] but immediate by perception or sense at once." And by "self-contradiction," Blake means that Reynolds is in self-divided and self-denying doubt, or in a dilemma derived from the reasoning which tries to split the mind's knowledge of one true thing into two parts, one true, one false, either of which creates a fiction or falsehood as fictitious and false as the reasoning which initially produced it. From Blake's point of view, then, Reynolds is false or contradictory because and only because he reasons. Now, it would be unfair to presume that Blake merely considers the argument of the Discourses contradictory because incon-

sistent, or any statement within them false simply because based on the wrong (in Blake's opinion) reasons. Blake's position is much more radical than this.

The distinction Blake draws is not between "wrong" and "right," but between reasoning and immediate perception, between the errors of ignorance on the one hand and the knowledge of self-evident truth on the other. If, however, Blake contends that Reynolds is purposefully and consciously stating the opposite of truth, another problem arises. In this case, Reynolds would still be reasoning in Blake's opinion, but not simply out of ignorance: rather, his reasoning would take the form of "negativizing" or "negating," the perpetuation of a fiction which does not exist except as a "negation," something Blake says is "the Spectre; the Reasoning Power in Man/This is a false Body" (M 40:34-35). We may surmise that on these occasions, Reynolds' assertion is in Blake's terms a "lie" because it "negatives," or denies the existence of, something Blake holds to be true. Again, the reasoning power puts Reynolds at fault. Therefore, in Blake's eyes the argument of the Discourses may be perfectly consistent because perfectly logical, and yet worthy of condemnation solely on account of the reasoning which not only underlies its structure, or parts of its structure, but actually informs it. This completely explains why Blake may say "Whether Reynolds. knew what he was doing. is nothing to me; the Mischief is just the same, whether a Man does it Ignorantly or Knowingly"--that is, whether he intentionally denies

truth or is merely blindly ignorant of it. To Blake's mind, anything not true must be false, and anything false, reasoned.

In order to remain consistent within the terms of his own argument, Blake would have to say that anything true cannot be reasoned. Moreover, to avoid logical contradictions within his system, Blake must be implying that his opinions, if they are by his definition true, cannot be founded in reason. But Blake never says his opinions of Reynolds are true, though he does offer the annotations as proof of them. What is more, that proof must be self-evident to the reader who tests its evidence or examines its meaning, or who at least is not ignorant or a "blockhead" or a "knave." Besides, Blake only claims that his opinions are contrary to Reynolds', and nothing more:

It is not in Terms that Reynolds & I disagree
Two Contrary Opinions can never by any Language be made alike. I say Taste & Genius are Not Teachable or Acquirable but are born with us
Reynolds says the Contrary. (MG 648)

What may be countered against Blake at this point is that he simply brands Reynolds' statements false, contradictory, or contrary when they deny or oppose either his opinions (especially aesthetic opinions) or his epistemology. This is an obvious criticism of Blake which is frequently made, and very true. He says as much himself in the too-easily misinterpreted statement, "The Reader must Expect to Read in all my Remarks on these Books Nothing but Indignation & Resentment" (MG 625). But many of Blake's remarks on the Discourses are in fact laudatory, and so if he praises a particular thought

of Reynolds' he must consider it true because "Contrary to [Reynolds'] usual Opinions" (MG 651) and in agreement with his own ideas. In other words, when Blake praises Reynolds, he praises his own idea as much as Reynolds'. Oddly enough, Blake cannot deny this either: in one of his notes on Reynolds he exclaims, "A Noble Sentence Here is a Sentence Which overthrows all his Book" (MG 638). The "noble" sentence in question concerns Reynolds' conception of the outline in painting, and it exactly agrees with the idea Blake expresses in many places on the subject. Indeed, Blake could never deny that every one of his own ideas is true--to do so would be self-contradictory in thinking, which in turn would make him guilty of doubt and reasoning.

It would appear from all this that Blake is claiming his ideas are always true, never false, and that he never contradicts himself, never doubts, never reasons. By this time, we may begin to see that he is in fact not reasoning, at least not convincingly, since he appears to be voicing claims to absolute knowledge of absolute truth, and these frequently in a tone of arrogance and insulting contempt. And yet, it is this very sort of absolute conviction in the truth of one's own ideas that Blake also claims to oppose--and expose--in Reynolds, and in Bacon, Newton, Locke, and the rest. At least, it is Blake's conviction that the error of the "Holy Reasoning Power" lies in making claims to moral virtue and purity, and to absolute knowledge embodied in a system of thought; but he does not say that no one can speak from absolute knowledge.

Blake, in a rather more public letter to a sheriff, expresses this conviction on the occasion of the imprisonment of an astrologer:

The Man who can Read the Stars. often is opressed by their Influence, no less than the Newtonian who reads Not & cannot Read is opressed by his own Reasonings & Experiments. We are all subject to Error: Who shall say <except the Natural Religionists> that we are not all subject to Crime. (L 706)

We can deduce three things from this passage: first, that the Newtonian reasoner is no more, or less, virtuous than the presumably non-reasoning astrologer; second, that no person, reasoner or non-reasoner, is totally free from error or ignorance of self-evident truth, which implies that knowledge of truth cannot be absolutely possessed by any individual, though it is available to everyone through immediate perception; and third, that therefore no one, except the "natural religionist" or empirical thinker, could deny, negate, or reason against the fact that we are all potentially able to commit a crime, an act of moral depravity and ignorance. Thus, in the space of three sentences, Blake embodies a large part of his theory of knowledge, although our interpretation of this passage has been pretty solidly based on the previous definition of only two terms--"reasoning" and "error." Blake's statement here, that "We are all subject to Error," is--like his other axiomatic and declarative statements--part of his system of ideas; and because "error" is an important word in Blake, we may take the whole sentence at face value, as one of Blake's self-evident truths. Therefore, in Blake's view no individual

can claim to be in himself absolutely true and without the bounds of error--"Truth has bounds. Error none"--not even Blake himself, as he indicates by his use of the pronoun "we." The empirical natural philosopher cannot claim to demonstrate the laws of true knowledge, "for All that is Valuable in Knowledge is Superior to Demonstrative Science such as is Weighed or Measured" (MG 648)--or, we may add, "reasoned." Nor can the empirical aesthetic philosopher, in this case Reynolds, claim to define the principles of true art, for "Demonstration Similitude & Harmony are Objects of Reasoning" (MG 648).²³ Again, Blake refutes Reynolds' articulations of the principles of art in relation to general nature with a pun and a definition of "truth": "God forbid that Truth should be Confined to Mathematical Demonstration" (MG 648).

And yet, in all this Blake may seem to contradict himself, for if he is to prove Reynolds false by his annotations (which he claims to do, for they are proofs of his opinions), he cannot reason and thereby rationally demonstrate that Reynolds' argument is false. Nor can Blake demonstrate that what he himself says is true--at any rate, he cannot use logical argument or reasoning to prove it, for he would then turn himself into exactly what he accuses Reynolds of being, self-contradictory and false. But if Blake allows error or ignorance in everyone, he must allow it in himself, and certainly his opinions are not always true, even in his own mind. Blake illustrates this by intentionally contradicting, actually mocking, the assertive value of his statements on occasion:

I do not pretend to be Perfect. but if my Works have faults Caracche Correggios & Rafaels have faults also. . . . Let me also notice that Carraches Pictures are not like Correggios nor Correggios like Rafaels & if neither of them was to be encouraged till he did like any of the others he must die without Encouragement My Pictures are unlike any of these Painters & I would have them to be so I think the manner I adopt More Perfect than any other no doubt They thought the same of theirs. (L 690)

But beneath this self-mockery is another attack on opinions and comparative judgments. Blake's opinions are obviously not logically true in that they form a coherent system of reasonable thought, a fact over which he would triumph: "I have always found that Angels have the vanity to speak of themselves as the only wise; this they do with a confident insolence sprouting from systematic reasoning" (MHH 41).

The nature of reasoning, as Blake well knew, is always potentially self-contradictory, since any statement can be contradicted simply by the virtue of language, as the word "contra-diction" implies. By adding a grammatical "negative"--the word Blake uses to describe one of the operations of the reasoning power--to any assertion, it may be transformed into its direct contrary. Blake gives us a satiric illustration of this in An Island in the Moon, which shows how self-contradictory argument may be little more than ideational self-defence in a form of infinite regress:

Obtuse Angle Scopprell Aradobo & Tilly Lally
are all met in Obtuse Angles study--

Pray said Aradobo is Chatterton a Mathematician. No said Obtuse Angle how can you be so foolish as to think he was. Oh I did not think he was I only askd said Aradobo. How could you

think he was not, & ask if he was said Obtuse Angle.--Oh no Sir I did think he was before you told me but afterwards I thought he was not

Obtuse Angle said in the first place you thought he was & then afterwards when I said he was not you thought he was not. why I know that--Oh no sir I thought that he was not but I askd to know whether he was.--How can that be said Obtuse Angle how could you ask & think that he was not--why said he. It came into my head that he was not--Why then said Obtuse Angle you said that he was. Did I say so Law I did not think I said that --Did not he said Obtuse Angle Yes said Scopprell. But I meant said Aradobo I I I cant think Law Sir I wish youd tell me, how it is. (PS 444)

However, Blake's method of attack against Reynolds is more complex than simple negation: often he must oppose one of Reynolds' opinions by countering it with a contrary idea, an opinion of his own.

But now whether or not Blake's opinion has any value or meaning as a true statement seems to depend upon whether or not the reader agrees with or believes it. Blake's system must account for this dilemma too: "Every thing possible to be believ'd is an image of truth" (MHH 36). Furthermore, he states that belief can have nothing to do with reason, since only a fool would attempt to provoke belief in what must be immediately perceived, or to prove or reason about self-evident truth: "Hes a Blockhead who wants a proof of what he Can't Percieve/And he's a Fool who tries to make such a Blockhead believe" (PT 499).²⁴ In the following poem, Blake reiterates his view of the interdependence of reason, doubt, and unbelief:

You dont believe I wont attempt to make ye
You are asleep I wont attempt to wake ye

Sleep on Sleep on while in your pleasant dreams
 Of Reason you may drink of Lifes clear streams
 Reason and Newton they are quite two things
 For so the Swallow & the Sparrow sings
 Reason says Miracle. Newton says Doubt
 Aye thats the way to make all Nature out
 Doubt Doubt & dont believe without experiment
 That is the very thing that Jesus meant
 When he said Only Believe Believe & try
 Try Try & never mind the Reason why. (PT 492)

This poem sets two contrary types of reason in opposition to one another, the first associated with "sleep," and the second with "miracle." As here, Blake does not employ conventional forms of rational thought, comparison, and logic to support his ideas, but rather uses them to oppose contrary ideas and statements to one another in a series of paradoxical aphorisms and ambiguous axioms which in turn permit him to express double meanings, one an offensive and the other a defensive philosophical position. In Blake's prophecies, joined with his annotated argument against Reynolds, we find evidence of a type of systematic thought which appears entirely free of internal contradictions and completely self-contained. However frequently Blake's thought may seem to fall into contradictions--as, for instance, when he speaks of a "negation" which is nonexistent and yet opposed to "contraries" and must be destroyed to redeem them--these are always merely apparent. Such contradictions are posed for a specific purpose, to frustrate our logical processes, and if we pursue them far enough we will find they are resolved on another plane of thought. Furthermore, Blake's system remains consistent by admitting within it all sorts of contradictory or contrary ideas; as he tells us, "there is a place where contrarieties

are equally true." The location of this place must be left to our discussion of Jerusalem, which will put Blake's total dialectic into perspective; and for the moment, the internal coherence of his system of thought with respect to Reynolds and next Burke must stand on its own as a matter of opinion. Hence Blake's stress on the word "opinion" on the title page of the Discourses, a word which now requires further definition.

"Opinion is one Thing. Principle another," writes Blake, "No Man can change his Principles Every Man changes his opinions" (MG 603). All this definition tells us, both halves of the latter statement being absolutes, is that opinions and principles are contrary to one another, and that principles are permanent and opinions impermanent. Like "error" which is "created," opinions must be transitory; and like "truth," principles must be eternal and true. The eternal nature of a principle is the reason Blake sneers at Reynolds for saying that "the arts would lie open for ever to caprice and casualty, if those who are to judge of their excellencies had no settled principles by which they are to regulate their decisions" (D 99). Blake feels that Reynolds "may as well say that if Man does not. lay down settled Principles. The Sun will not rise in a Morning" (MG 649). This comment reveals yet again his contempt for reasoned judgments, which are closer in his mind to opinions, in the face of a response to something, like the sun or art, which is beyond the power or control of reason.

Opinions, then, are reasoned and subject to change; prin-

ciples are another matter: "He who supposes that his Principles are to be changed is a Dissembler who Disguises his Principles & calls that change" (MG 603). Thus, with regard to his judgment of Reynolds, if Blake speaks from principle what he says should be true and unreasoned. And if he says something false, then it is an opinion--not a principle--and created by reasoning. The only way to discover the truth or falsity of anything Blake states is, as I have suggested, to find an internal contradiction within his thought, something that is contrary to a principle stated elsewhere. This may conceivably happen, but those falsities Blake may consistently argue are opinions derived from reasoning, or errors which any man may make.

It is now evident that Blake has constructed for his entire system a framework with its own logical, though circular, consistency: he may reason with us as much as he likes, for he may have either false or true opinions; he only demands that his principles be examined, with or without the aid of reason and logic, for signs of contradiction. If Blake's system of thought exhibits such contradictions, then he may be proven illogical and judged false by his own standards or by anyone else's; but if it does not, then he has indeed created a system which is perfectly consistent and perhaps true by some people's standards, or perhaps not, but certainly true by his own. In the final analysis, we can only either prove Blake inconsistent by attempting to expose his false opinions, or else contradict what he states--in other words,

we must reason against him. This is the implicit challenge with which he taunts the reasoner: "The Man who pretends to be a modest enquirer into the truth of a self evident thing is a Knave" (MG 603).

No doubt some of Blake's critical opinions seem to overstate his case and are exaggerated in their vehemence, as, for example, when he sarcastically refers to Reynolds as "this President of Fools" (MG 636) or as "S^r Joshua & his Gang of Cunning Hired Knaves" (MG 625). But the element of sardonic humour in such name-calling should not be totally ignored, and neither should the principle underlying any one of his aesthetic opinions. When Blake, in the following paragraph from his Public Address, denounces the "point of light" in Flemish painting and turns it into a metaphorical "witticism," his opinion becomes a vehicle for the articulation of a much more serious principle, one which holds that the embodiment of truth in art cannot be confined to single instances (like a point of light), especially when those instances are rigidly and narrowly defined by systematic rules, or are designed to titillate the lover of "vulgar epigrams" instead of truth itself:

I hope my Countrymen will Excuse me if I tell them a Wholesome truth Most Englishmen when they look at a Picture immediately set about searching for Points of Light < & clap the Picture into a dark corner {this in} < This when done by > Grand Works is like looking for Epigrams in Homer > A point of light is a Witticism many are destructive of all Art < One is an Epigram only > & no Grand Work can have them they Produce System & Monotony. (PS 568)

This opinion-metaphor of Blake's is literally confusing, or in his words, "not too Explicit," an artistic merit he considered "the fittest for Instruction because it rouzes the faculties to act" (L 676). Such passages also demand that each statement be read on different levels at once rather than being formalized as a discrete part of a larger, higher, incomprehensible, and ineffable principle of a system of aesthetics. For Blake, "Thought is Act" (MG 612), and the act of reading, thinking about, or in any way responding to art in order to seek truth is the same as an attempt to perceive it. This is why Blake lashes out at the point-of-light school which asks that we "clap the picture into a dark corner" and search for epigrammatic "lights" of truth. The full context of this particular opinion is elucidated by a comment in Blake's marginalia which equates "vicious action" with "darkness": "no man can do a Vicious action & think it to be Virtuous. no man can take darkness for light. he may pretend to do so & may pretend to be a modest Enquirer. but he is a Knave" (MG 603).

Like his opinionated hatred of the Venetian and Flemish artists, Blake's opposition to Reynolds is both real and calculated at the same time, but it is not less real for having been fashioned from "that Species [of art] which gives Existence to Every other. namely Visions of Eternity" (L 676), the same visions which dictate his permanent and eternal principles. Disagreement to the letter of Reynolds' opinions was not Blake's concern: seeing Reynolds as "destructive of all art" on account

certain tendencies (which will shortly be examined) lurking in the aesthetic principles put forward in the Discourses, Blake consciously chose to take the contrary opinion or position. As Edward J. Rose suggests,

Blake's opinions about painters are not based on purely aesthetic considerations. For Blake "True" art, and True is his word, cannot be concerned with trivia or with self-seeking; it cannot lack prophetic vision. A "true" or "real" artist who creates true and real art must be himself true and real.²⁵

And the contrary position which Blake's prophetic vision demanded he take up has as its foundation the principle that "Without Contraries is no progression" (MHH 34), that "Opposition is true Friendship" (MHH 41).

NOTES

¹ One such unanswerable question of Blake's, posed in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, points to the dependency of reasoning upon sense experience: "How do you know but ev'ry Bird that cuts the airy way,/Is an immense world of delight, clos'd by your senses five?" (MHH 35).

² Northrop Frye, Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1947), pref.

³ Frye, p. 14.

⁴ The Complete Writings of William Blake: With All the Variant Readings, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London: The Nonesuch Press, 1957), p. 796 and p. 878.

⁵ J 64:27.

⁶ KG 265 and EG 512.

⁷ MG 613, 615, 632-33, 637, 641.

⁸ MG 628, 643.

⁹ MG 640.

¹⁰ The Complete Writings of William Blake, ed. Keynes, p. 828 and p. 838.

¹¹ M 3:8, J 69:3.

¹² Frederic Will, "Blake's Quarrel with Reynolds," Journal of Aesthetics & Art Criticism, 15 (March, 1957), 343.

¹³ Herbert Wright, "William Blake and Sir Joshua Reynolds: A Contrast in Theories of Art," The Nineteenth Century and After, 101 (March, 1927), 429.

¹⁴ Wright, p. 430.

¹⁵ Edgar Wind, "Blake and Reynolds," The Listener,
28 Nov. 1957, p. 879.

¹⁶ Wind, p. 879.

¹⁷ Wright, p. 418.

¹⁸ Will, pp. 347-48.

¹⁹ Lipking, p. 165.

²⁰ Hazard Adams, "The Blakean Aesthetic," Journal of
Aesthetics & Art Criticism, 13 (Dec., 1954), 234.

²¹ Frye, p. 410.

²² MG 629, 632-34, 642, 646, 648-49, 651.

²³ Here the noun "objects" clinches the pun found earlier in the definition of reasoning as an "objecting" power, but it also brings to mind that Blake has said "Objections" do not exist. Together these clues give us two Blakean definitions for the verb "to object" in addition to its usual ones: to turn things into objects, and to raise objections which do not exist. In addition, to the term "object" as a noun are attached two new equivalent meanings: objections which do not exist, and fictions.

²⁴ We may at this point recall the line of Jerusalem, "Negations Exist Not: Exceptions & Objections & Unbeliefs/ Exist not" (J 17:34-35), which defines "unbeliefs" as another of the nonexistent fictions of reasoning.

²⁵ Edward J. Rose, "'A Most Outrageous Demon': Blake's Case Against Rubens," Bucknell Review, 17 (1969), 35.

If Reynolds' argument in the Discourses does proceed "in a dialectic of the one and the many," as Hipple explains, with the "distinction of general and particular [as] the constant analytic device, and universality the invariable criterion of excellence,"¹ then this is not the method of Blake. "Universality," though a meaningful concept for Blake, certainly does not refer to "general nature" in his mind the way it does in Reynolds'. But like Reynolds, Blake never attempts to define the term "general nature" in a single statement. Instead he asks two rhetorical questions--"What is General Nature is there Such a Thing what is General Knowledge is there such a Thing"--immediately followed by a definition of "knowledge"--"{Strictly Speaking} All Knowledge is Particular" (MG 637)--which together suggest the nonexistence of both general knowledge and knowledge of general nature. Blake defines all knowledge as particular, and truth as being embodied in the particular or individual man who is its actor or agent. He even goes so far as to state that truth and man are equivalent: "There is not an Error but it has a Man for its {Actor} Agent that is it is a Man: There is not a Truth but it has also a Man" (VJL 553). Finally he defines the man of general knowledge as an "idiot": "To Generalize is to be an Idiot To Particularize is the Alone Distinction of Merit--General Knowledges are those Knowledges that Idiots possess" (MG 630).

Thus, Blake's reasoning strips Reynolds' idea of general

nature of its status as a general truth by equating it with the nonexistent knowledge of idiots. For Blake, any general idea or idea of general nature is simply an abstraction which is always one step removed from the fact of being or existence. Whether it be Locke's principle of primary and secondary ideas, or Reynolds' idea of the central form, general ideas are to Blake the fictions of "Abstract Philosophy" which seeks to abstract or

deduct from a rose its redness, from a lilly
its whiteness from a diamond its hardness
from a sponge its softness from an oak its
height from a daisy its lowness & rectify
every thing in Nature as the Philosophers
do. & then we shall return to Chaos & God
will be compell'd to be Excentric if he
Creates O happy Philosopher. (MG 585)

In answer to Reynolds' equation of the idea of general nature with general truth, Blake argues that since truth is a man, all knowledge is particular and cannot be abstracted from the individual who possesses it.

Like Locke, who "seemed persuaded that the continued discovery of new knowledge suggests that there are vast horizons of reality that we may advance upon but can never reach,"² Reynolds saw the pursuit of knowledge of general nature as the quest for a "perfection, which is dimly seen, at a great though not hopeless distance . . . which we must always follow because we never can attain [it]" (D 143). Ideal beauty is to Reynolds "general and intellectual; it is an idea that subsists only in the mind; the sight never beheld it, nor has the hand expressed it" (D 143). Blake, too, felt that perfection,

or any other idea, subsists or exists only in the mind, but he extends this notion to its furthest limits, arguing that existence itself is mental, itself an idea or thought with reference only to the mind: "Mental Things are alone Real . . . Where is Existence Out of Mind or Thought Where is it but in the Mind of a Fool" (VLJ 555). Blake considered both Reynolds' and Locke's reluctance to allow anything more than the approach to knowledge of reality--that is, ultimate reality --and never the attainment of it, as subversive of all knowledge. In order to know anything, Blake states, we must have a direct experience or an immediate perception of what it is. And if, as Reynolds claims, general nature is only imperfectly apprehended and never wholly comprehended by the mind of the individual, then all men must remain in doubt as to the nature of reality as a whole, and whether it exists at all. The sense, then, in which we may be said to possess an idea of general nature, or to have any knowledge of reality, is questionable at best; and in Blake's mind, Reynolds' claim that we must induce the idea of general nature or ultimate reality from our experience of it in mental and physical phenomena is ambiguous and equivocal, full of contradictions. For Blake, only thought exists, and since existence is only an idea in thought, and furthermore since only thought, ideas, or "mental things" are real, reality in either the part or the whole must be identical to both thought and existence which are inseparable. Knowledge of reality, therefore, is the same as the body of ideas present in the individual mind, which

body comprehends the whole of each man's existence or experience of both his own thoughts and the objective world. This knowledge, moreover, is formed by our direct experience or immediate perception of both ideas and objects of sense: this is why Blake argues that knowledge of anything is "Immediate by Perception or Sense at once."

Whether we speak of Reynolds' "perfect state of nature" which is mental and ideal, or of Locke's phenomenal world of reality which is known through sense experience, if these are at last unattainable or unknowable in themselves, then Blake would say that we must finally doubt that we can ever attain any idea, let alone one of reality, or that we can ever know the reality we every day experience. This sort of scepticism Blake defines as the doubt in which reasoning inevitably finds itself, the doubt which, by first denying knowledge of absolute reality, must next deny absolute reality itself, and finally negate the existence of both altogether. And once this existence is negated, the Blakean reasoner would argue, you must logically negate the existence of yourself and end in self-contradiction.

The self-evident truths, according to Blake, are that existence is the ultimate reality, that that reality is known by the mind, and that the individual mind is both the part and the whole of the existence it knows and the ideas of reality it creates. That knowledge and that reality are furthermore inseparable and immediate, whether they are perceived to be so or not. Indeed, there is a crucial way in

which the individual creates the reality in which he exists, for not only is the mind inseparable from all objects of its perception, Blake asserts that "Thought is Act" (MG 612), implying that the individual will act upon the world in the way he perceives it. If the mind sees itself as isolate and inviolable, it will create a vision of reality which is also isolate and inviolable; and such an individual--whom Blake calls the "devourer"--will mistake his own divided or separated thoughts for the whole of reality: "he only takes portions of existence and fancies that the whole" (MHH 39). This partial vision, which paradoxically assumes that reality is either unknowable or unattainable, is the reason why Blake warns Reynolds, "As the Eye--Such the Object" (MG 634).

This warning is Blake's refutation of Reynolds' dictum that the artist must undergo a continual recourse to nature. Such an idea was ambiguous enough for Blake to see that, as Reynolds himself allows, there is a duality in, or two possible interpretations for, the term "nature," either subjective or objective--that is, either as physical (world) or human (ideas) nature. Blake merges the two contrary interpretations into a third which identifies (or equates) both points of view without denying their initial contrary distinctions. It is Blake's belief that "We are led to Believe a Lie/When we see not Thro the Eye" (AI 484), that anyone who sees only an objective or subjective view of reality will live in exactly what he perceives, so that he who sees that all views are mental ones will live a mental existence, or exist in thought,

which Blake says is identical to reality. "As a man is," says Blake of this mental existence, "So he Sees. As the Eye is formed such are its Powers" (L 677). Blake's analogical equation of being and perceiving in this aphorism attempts to resolve all contradictory viewpoints by turning the notion of point of view into an ambiguous concept, arguing that all viewpoints are dependent upon the individual's perception, and all perceptions upon point of view. Consequently, the idea of general nature in the mind of an objective thinker might be formed by the sense of sight's perception of objects alone; and since thought is act, those objects would in turn be acted upon according to the form of the idea. Thus, in The Book of Urizen Blake depicts "Eternity shudder[ing] when they saw,/Man begetting his likeness,/On his own divided image" (BU 19:14-16). And in response to Reynolds' claim that the idea of general nature will be true for all men because "we have no reason to suspect there is a greater difference between our minds than between our forms; of which, though there are no two alike, yet there is a general similitude that goes through the whole race of mankind" (D 107), Blake would argue: "Nonsense--Every Eye Sees differently" (MG 634).

Reynolds' error, according to Blake, lay in his system and its total reliance upon the distinction between the general and particular. For Blake, there are no "greater" and "lesser" truths--there is only one truth, and Reynolds' refusal to allow the embodiment of truth in both the many and the one was tantamount to denying it completely. In any case,

the distinction between "greater" and "lesser" truths, which seems to imply that one thing may be more true than another true thing, leads to the kind of contradictions Blake considered dangerous because open to the distortions of interpretation. Possibly Blake would also see Reynolds' hesitation to define clearly and directly what general nature itself is as leaving a void at the center of his system of thought; he reminds Reynolds, at any rate, that "Grandeur of Ideas is founded on Precision of Ideas" (MG 636). When Reynolds says,

We cannot . . . recommend an undeterminate manner, or vague ideas of any kind, in a complete and finished picture . . . every thing shall be carefully and distinctly expressed, as if the painter knew, with correctness and precision, the exact form and character of whatever is introduced into the picture (D 138-39),

Blake was moved to exclaim "Excellent & Contrary to his usual Opinions" (MG 651) for the very reason he despised Reynolds' vague and indeterminate manner of expressing his idea of general nature. If "Every body does not see alike" (L 677), then Reynolds' own expression of the idea of general nature could too easily be particularized and even entirely transformed in the mind of the individual artist, as was evident in the case of James Barry, a protégé of Reynolds, who, Lipking tells us, "applied Reynolds' principles far more uncompromisingly than Reynolds ever had, turned his ideals savagely against him, and mocked his work."³ To Blake, the attempt to teach methods of acquiring any idea was pointless, not only because the man "who Learns or Acquires all he Knows from Others. Must be full of Contradictions" (MG 628), but also

because "Knowledge of Ideal Beauty. is Not to be Acquired
It is Born with us Innate Ideas. are in Every Man Born with
him. they are <truly> Himself" (MG 637).

According to Blake, innate ideas like that of beauty are givens in human nature, unalterable principles that cannot be changed, and any man's perception of a particular object or acquired concept may be transformed by the intention or purpose he has in mind, even though the innate idea itself remains untouched. Consequently, though all men possess an idea of beauty, each man will have a different perception of what is beautiful: "To the Eyes of a Miser a Guinea is more beautiful than the Sun & a bag worn with the use of Money has more beautiful proportions than a Vine filled with Grapes" (MG 677). Blake's position is that the idea of beauty or any ideal form is not perfected by close observation of the object as Reynolds claims: "it is from a reiterated experience, and a close comparison of the objects in nature, that an artist becomes possessed of the idea of that central form" (D 30); rather, all objects are perceived in light of the innate idea which alters everything that is seen: "For the Eye altering alters all" (PT 476). Blake argues that neither the concept of nature nor the natural objects of perception can be isolated from the man who perceives them as mental images or forms; nor can the perceiver think of himself as an objective viewer: "The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the Eyes of others only a Green thing that stands in the way. Some see Nature all Ridicule & Deformity . . . & Some Scarce

see Nature at all" (L 677).

In the place of Reynolds' idea of general nature, Blake upholds the imaginative idea or "infinite perception," which, according to Hazard Adams, "expressed as symbol is not an abstraction from material existence at all. It never existed materially in the first place."⁴ The imagination, which by Blake's definition is "Spiritual Sensation" (MG 677), is alone capable of transforming objective reality into the ideal, of aligning the object with an innate idea, hence it works to transform whatever it sees into a human image, or the "Human Form Divine." Reynolds' observation that "Art has its boundaries, though imagination has none" (D 59) would be stated quite differently by Blake: he would maintain that reason has its boundaries, though art and imagination have none. He further maintains that the imagination, as the source of "Inspiration & Vision" (MG 650), when joined with desire seeks to alter human life in much the same way that Reynolds' "contemplation of general truth" in the aesthetic experience tends toward the "gradual exaltation of human nature" (D 142). But Blake strongly objects to Reynolds' assertion that the imagination cannot be original and must remain tied to sense experience by the bonds of reason, however correct Reynolds was in saying that "the great end of all [the] arts is, to make an impression on the imagination and the feeling" (D 204). By denying the originality of the imagination, Reynolds had knocked down Blake's exalted concepts of genius, inspiration, vision, and invention with a single blow.

In Blake's judgment, Reynolds was justified in his claim that "the more we purify [art] from every thing that is gross in sense, in that proportion we advance its use and dignity; and in proportion as we lower it to mere sensuality, we pervert its nature" (D 143). But when Reynolds goes on to say that "nature is refined, subtle, and infinitely various . . . it is necessary, therefore, to have continual recourse to her" (D 190), Blake saw this as a contradictory statement, one which makes art dependent upon objective nature though independent of it at the same time. The source of this paradox in Reynolds' thinking Blake would find in the notion of objectivity. Although Reynolds could always distinguish between the material world and the mind, between common nature and human nature, and argue that art is concerned with the latter in each case, his mistake was to make the mind ultimately dependent upon matter for the content of its ideas, thereby putting the lie to the idea of general nature being primary. Such contradictory arguments could only result from the net of empirical reasoning in which Blake saw Reynolds entangled.

In Blake's aesthetics, the first principle of art is that it can have nothing whatever to do with the material world of nature, which we do not know. Art is a creation of the mind which speaks in symbols referring not to things, but to mental life. Blake further disagrees with Reynolds' opinion that the rules and principles of ideal beauty, though they "vary without end" (D 31), have "unalterable and fixed foundations in [general] nature" (D 97), for those rules and

principles--if they can be called such--exist only as innate ideas in the mind of man. Nor could Blake agree with Reynolds' point that the mind must also have its fixed principles in nature because the "internal fabrick of our minds, as well as the external form of our bodies, [are] nearly uniform" (D 107). Not only did Blake consider this a false division between the body and the mind or soul--"Man has no Body distinct from his Soul" (MHH 34)--he did not believe that their uniformity in mankind need necessarily contradict the infinite variety of both: "As all men are alike in outward form, So (and with the same infinite variety) all are alike in the Poetic Genius" (ARO 2). To Blake, "mind," "imagination," and "poetic genius" are equivalent terms, and because all men possess them, there will be as great a variety amongst their forms as differences, physical or mental, among men. Besides, we only know physical forms as a mental image, and so "all of us on earth are united in thought, for it is impossible to think without images of somewhat on earth" (MG 590).

Reynolds' positing an idea of general nature on the basis of the "general similitude that goes through the whole race of mankind" might not have been so abhorrent to Blake had Reynolds defined it in terms other than "general" (which implies a mental abstraction) and "nature" (which implies dead matter). Furthermore, Reynolds' argument that "particularities cannot be nature: for how can that be the nature of man, in which no two individuals are the same?" (D 100) is fallacious in Blake's eyes, simply because the differences

among men are as real and existing as any similarity. And if particularities are not nature, as Reynolds contends, then judgment must be pronounced upon the relative status, general or particular, of any given thing. And, as Reynolds admits, only reason can determine if an aesthetic object is either "general" or "particular," worthy of art or too minute to be of value; indeed, only reason can make distinctions by comparing and judging at all. But if we grant Blake's axiom that "every eye sees differently," then reasoned judgments of the value of art can never be pronounced with certainty, since contradictory arguments defining the object as either "general" or "particular" will always arise like spectres out of the body of contrary opinions, and only the agreement of individuals will arbitrarily determine the question. Blake never took issue with Reynolds for saying that the artist's mind forms a concept or image of the ideal, but rather with his understanding of what the ideal is: Reynolds' argument upholds the general, and Blake's the particular and universal forms of art. They are two contrary opinions, as Blake pointed out.

NOTES

¹ Hipple, "General and Particular," p. 234.

² James G. Clapp, "John Locke," Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 4 (1967 ed.), 497.

³ Lipking, p. 167.

⁴ Adams, p. 238.

According to James T. Boulton, Edmund Burke probably began composition of his Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful as early as 1747 while he was yet a college student of eighteen, although it continued to occupy him until the first edition was brought out ten years later, on April 21, 1757.¹ Immediate critical reaction to the Enquiry was, on the whole, favourable, Burke's observations and method of presentation being generally acknowledged as new, perspicuous, and ingenious. But the theory embodied in the essay met with a far more ambiguous reception: writes Boulton, "none [of Burke's critics] fully accepted his theory: neither did any one of them fully reject it."² Still, the influence and intellectual challenge of the Enquiry was felt well into the beginning of the nineteenth century, especially by those philosophical writers (of France and Germany as well as England) whose ruminations turned upon the problem of the aesthetic experience, even though the "one daringly simple principle"³--sensationalism--of Burke's theory was never taken very seriously by any of them. While Burke's views on the experience of beauty and sublimity in art had great impact indeed both during and after his own time, his analysis of how that experience originates in the mind had but little.

Burke's belief that "the condition of our nature binds us to a strict law and very narrow limits" (E 4) was undoubtedly one of the major reasons for his venturing into the narrow

straits of sensationism. Philosophically speaking, sensationism is "the attempt to restrict propositions or theories to terms directly derivable from observation,"⁴ or more simply the theory that sense experience is the only source of knowledge. In his preface to the first edition of the Enquiry, Burke discusses the "confusion of ideas" which had resulted from previous attempts to define beauty and sublimity in the aesthetic response, and proceeds to outline the empirical method he will use to rectify the situation:

Could this admit of any remedy, I imagined it could only be from a diligent examination of our passions in our own breasts; from a careful survey of the properties of things which we find by experience to influence those passions; and from a sober and attentive investigation of the laws of nature, by which those properties are capable of affecting the body, and thus of exciting our passions. If this could be done, it was imagined that the rules deducible from such an enquiry might be applied to the imitative arts, and to whatever else they concerned, without much difficulty. (E 1)

Samuel Monk sees this notion of the properties of things affecting the physical body and thus in turn exciting the mental passions as largely responsible for that originality which Burke's readers were so consistently quick to notice, and remarks that Burke "attempts the somewhat heroic task of building up a system on his own observations of his physical and mental being."⁵ But, as Monk also points out, Burke's aesthetic system was based for the most part upon observations peculiar to himself, and in order to get around this very problem Burke was compelled to take refuge in the idea of the universality of the nature of man:

On a superficial view, we may seem to differ very widely from each other in our reasonings, and no less in our pleasures: but notwithstanding this difference, which I think to be rather apparent than real, it is probable that the standard both of reason and Taste is the same in all human creatures. For if there were not some principles of judgment as well as of sentiment common to all mankind, no hold could possibly be taken either on their reason or their passions, sufficient to maintain the ordinary correspondence of life. (E 11)

For Burke, then, all human beings are affected in their passions, and form their reasonings, upon one or more principles.

Unlike Hume or Reynolds who held that a standard of taste could be established with any degree of certainty only in the realm of art,⁶ Burke claims that uniformity and agreement must exist in the aesthetic response because it exists in all our responses, the mind being always affected--in the general view of mankind--in exactly the same way: "if Taste has no fixed principles, if the imagination is not affected according to some invariable and certain laws, our labour is like to be employed to very little purpose" (E 12). Reynolds, as we have seen, defines general nature in art, as well as the uniformity of response it evokes, as an idea which is beautiful and true because correspondent to the internal fabric of the mind; furthermore, "whatever pleases has in it what is analogous to the mind, and is therefore . . . natural" (D 102). In addition, Reynolds says that general nature is "infinitely various," and that the standard of taste exists only in relation to it. Burke proceeds in quite another fashion: although he does not use the term "general nature," he posits one by saying first that the organs and operation of the senses

are identical, or nearly so, in all men:

And first with regard to the senses. We do and must suppose, that as the conformation of their organs are nearly, or altogether the same in all men, so the manner of perceiving external objects is in all men the same, or with little difference. (E 13)

Thus, Burke shifts the primary cause of agreement in men's perceptions from the mind to the more restricted province of the senses:

If we suffer ourselves to imagine, that their senses present to different men different images of things, this sceptical proceeding will make every sort of reasoning on every subject vain and frivolous, even sceptical reasoning itself, which had persuaded us to entertain a doubt concerning the agreement of our perceptions. But as there will be very little doubt that bodies present similar images to the whole species, it must necessarily be allowed, that the pleasures and the pains which every object excites in one man, it must raise in all mankind, whilst it operates naturally, simply, and by its proper powers only; for if we deny this, we must imagine, that the same cause operating in the same manner, and on subjects of the same kind, will produce different effects, which would be highly absurd. (E 13-14)

Burke's following "Introduction on Taste" is an analysis of how certain objects must necessarily give pleasure or pain upon the same fixed principles or "natural causes" (E 16)--this is quite contrary to Reynolds, who insists that the objects themselves give aesthetic pleasure only insofar as they participate in or conform to the principles of ideal beauty or (which is the same thing) general nature. Mere objects of sense, Reynolds says, are partial nature and even something of an hindrance to man's perception of what

is true and ideal, this being specifically the province of the imagination which, though unoriginal, has no boundaries. Burke, on the other hand, restricts the originality and power of the imagination even further, making it too ultimately dependent upon the senses:

Besides the ideas, with their annexed pains and pleasures, which are presented by the sense; the mind of man possesses a sort of creative power of its own; either in representing at pleasure the images of things in the order and manner in which they were received by the senses, or in combining those images in a new manner, and according to a different order. This power is called Imagination; and to this belongs whatever is called wit, fancy, invention, and the like. But it must be observed, that this power of the imagination is incapable of producing any thing absolutely new; it can only vary the disposition of those ideas which it has received from the senses. Now the imagination is the most extensive province of pleasure and pain, as it is the region of our fears and our hopes, and of all our passions that are connected with them; and whatever is calculated to affect the imagination with these commanding ideas, by force of any original natural impression, must have the same power pretty equally over all men. For since the imagination is only the representative of the senses, it can only be pleased or displeased with the images from the same principle on which the sense is pleased or displeased with the realities; and consequently there must be just as close an agreement in the imaginations as in the senses of men. (E 16-17)

When Burke, then, speaks of the pleasures of the imagination as always arising from fixed principles in nature, he means that nature which consists of the world of phenomena, or objective reality, or what Reynolds refers to as nature in its narrow and confined sense. Burke goes on to say,

In the imagination, besides the pain or pleasure arising from the properties of the natural object, a pleasure is perceived from the resemblance, which the imitation has to the original; the imagination, I conceive, can have no pleasure but what results from one or other of these causes. And these causes operate pretty uniformly upon all men, because they operate by principles in nature, and which are not derived from any particular habits or advantages. (E 17)

Like Hume, who says that because "the essence of the mind [is] equally unknown to us with that of external bodies" and therefore "any hypothesis, that pretends to discover the ultimate original qualities of human nature, ought at first to be rejected as presumptuous and chimerical,"⁷ Burke denies that his philosophical enquiry is intended to arrive at the ultimate source, cause, or essence of either the mind or external bodies:

When I say, I intend to enquire into the efficient cause of sublimity and beauty, I would not be understood to say, that I can come to the ultimate cause. I do not pretend that I shall ever be able to explain, why certain affections of the body produce such a distinct emotion of mind, and no other; or why the body is at all affected by the mind, or the mind by the body. A little thought will shew this to be impossible. (E 129)

Nevertheless, Burke goes one step beyond Hume by implying that the body does indeed affect the mind in certain, discoverable ways which point to the common, general principles of human nature. His suggestion is that the original qualities of human nature pertain either to physical pleasure and pain, or to the properties of physical bodies affecting the passions, feelings, or emotions of mental pleasure and pain, whereas Hume

emphatically denies that these original qualities are knowable in themselves, even though the principles by which they operate may be investigated by observation and other empirical methods. Burke may deny knowledge of ultimate causes, but he does not hesitate to extend the empiricism of Hume, and even Locke, with the claim that all the contents and reactions --in Burke's terminology, "ideas" and "affections"--of the mind originate in sense experience: "as the senses are the great originals of all our ideas, and consequently of all our pleasures, if they are not uncertain and arbitrary, the whole ground-work of Taste is common to all" (E 23).

At this point in Burke's theory, the objection could be raised that primary sense perceptions are never the same for anyone, because no two individuals come in contact with exactly the same set of objects during the period of their lifetime, which renders the notion in Burke's system of a common, universal "ground-work" in the mind or imagination ridiculous. This Burke refutes by arguing that the natural faculty of imagination never differs: insofar as men do have similar sense experience to a greater or lesser degree, they must have similarity of taste. Differences, therefore, in primary or secondary perceptions and in taste are purely accidental:

Now as the pleasure of resemblance is that which principally flatters the imagination, all men are nearly equal in this point, as far as their knowledge of the things represented or compared extends. The principle of this knowledge is very much accidental, as it depends upon experience and observation, and not on the strength or weakness

of any natural faculty; and it is from this difference in knowledge that what we commonly, though with no great exactness, call a difference in Taste proceeds. (E 18)

Thus, Burke is able to claim that taste is either unformed or weak due to a "want of knowledge in art" which proceeds from "inexperience," or from a "want of knowledge in nature" which in turn stems from lack of observation or insufficient attention to the object (E 19). "The critical Taste," he asserts, "does not depend upon a superior principle in men, but upon superior knowledge" (E 19).

The same line of argument is employed to prove that the passions affect all men in fundamentally the same way: "Love, grief, fear, anger, joy, all these passions have in their turns affected every mind; and they do not affect it in an arbitrary or casual manner, but upon certain, natural and uniform principles" (E 22). Our aesthetic taste, Burke concludes, rests upon a common principle in the same way that "the condition of our nature binds us to a strict law and very narrow limits":

So far then as Taste belongs to the imagination, its principle is the same in all men; there is no difference in the manner of their being affected, nor in the causes of the affection; but in the degree there is a difference, which arises from two causes principally; either from a greater degree of natural sensibility, or from a closer and longer attention to the object. (E 21)

Burke's "Introduction on Taste," designed to illuminate the common principle underlying all aesthetic judgments, also lays much of the groundwork for his argument concerning

the nature of the aesthetic response. Throughout the main body of the Enquiry Burke's treatment of beauty and sublimity centers on his distinction between pain and pleasure, which are "simple ideas, incapable of definition" (E 32), and these are examined from the same sensationist position put forward in the "Introduction." Obviously, Burke's methods are empirical, an attempt to bring aesthetics into the field of natural philosophy or science, where observation, comparison, and inductive reasoning may dispel the age-old enemies, ignorance and superstition, by ranking the innumerable and seemingly inconsistent particulars of experience and placing them under the command of one general truth. "We ought to compare our subject with things of a similar nature, and even with things of a contrary nature," writes Burke; "the greater number of these comparisons we make, the more general and the more certain our knowledge is like to prove, as built upon a more extensive and perfect induction" (E 4). "By looking into physical causes," he adds, "our minds are opened and enlarged; and in this pursuit whether we take or whether we lose our game, the chace [sic] is certainly of service" (E 5). Like Pope before him, Burke was working from the premise that "the science of Human Nature is, like all other sciences, reduced to a few clear points."⁸

It is not pertinent to our discussion of the general and particular to follow the course of Burke's reasonings upon the nature of the sublime and beautiful; in any event, modern criticism has been unanimous in judging those reasonings to be

absurd and extreme. Boulton, for example, judges that

The fallacies of the sensationist position are clear enough. The sensationist ignores, among other things, the difference between life and art, and the whole question of aesthetic "significance"; he must omit the subjective element which decides this significance, the fact that it is in our personal "ideas" of objects which we call beautiful that the beauty lies and that, in turn, these ideas depend on personal interests, predilections, emotions, and so on. He confuses, indeed, sense-data, the crude material of the aesthetic experience, with aesthetic perception which has its own distinctive values. Sensationism with all its fallacies obviously committed Burke to a number of ludicrous and extreme statements.⁹

What is most significant about Burke's Enquiry at present is that Burke, like Reynolds, conceives of a principle of general nature operating in all men which in importance overrides anything connected with the particular experience of the individual:

Who is a stranger to that manner of expression so common in all times and in all countries, of being softened, relaxed, enervated, dissolved, melted away by pleasure? The universal voice of mankind, faithful to their feelings, concurs in affirming this uniform and general effect; and although some odd and particular instance may perhaps be found, wherein there appears a considerable degree of positive pleasure, without all the characters of relaxation, we must not therefore reject the conclusion we had drawn from a concurrence of many experiments. (E 150)

But unlike Reynolds, who uses the term "idea" in essentially the Platonic sense, Burke in his discussion of our "ideas" of the sublime and beautiful, or of pleasure and pain, refers basically to the Lockean meaning of the word, though his is a more radical version of it. Thus, for Reynolds, "general

nature" exists as an idea in the Platonic sense of an eternal archetype or pattern which the mind of man is fitted to perceive; for Burke, it is a "uniform and general effect" upon the mind resulting from those encounters with the phenomenal world which are pretty well universal in the experience of mankind. But for both Burke and Reynolds, the particular, whether in nature or as an object of knowledge, is of little value, for it cannot infallibly exemplify what is universally true.

NOTES

¹ James T. Boulton, ed., in introd. to A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful, by Edmund Burke (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958), p. xv.

² Boulton, p. xxiii.

³ Boulton, p. lxxxiii.

⁴ John W. Yolton, ed., in introd. to An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, by John Locke (Don Mills: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1965), p. xi.

⁵ Samuel H. Monk, The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in XVIII-Century England (New York: Modern Language Assn., 1935), p. 92.

⁶ See David Hume, Of the Standard of Taste and Other Essays, ed. John W. Lenz (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1965), p. 18; and Hipple, p. 243.

⁷ David Hume, Hume Selections, ed. Charles W. Hendel, Jr. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1927), p. 5.

⁸ Alexander Pope, Essay on Man in Alexander Pope: Selected Poetry & Prose, ed. William K. Wimsatt (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1951), p. 191.

⁹ Boulton, p. xxxvii.

Both Reynolds' Discourses and Burke's Enquiry reveal a decided confidence in the eighteenth-century philosophical method of inquiry; its techniques of experiment, observation, comparison; and the empirical validation of theory. And both writers followed the inductive method of reasoning which moves from the evidence of particular phenomena to the general law governing those phenomena. However, while Reynolds' Discourses are didactic and aesthetic, Burke's Enquiry is an unabashed attempt to turn aesthetic theory into a more strictly scientific philosophy. As Samuel Monk points out,

In Part IV Burke attempts to explain psychologically and physiologically, the effect of the ideas discussed in Parts I and II, so as to reach the "efficient cause" of the sublime, and it is at this point that he seems most original. Whatever one may think of his deductions, no one can deny that in seeking to observe the physiology of beauty and sublimity, in going beyond the passions to the body, and in bringing the whole organism into the aesthetic experience, Burke showed remarkable "modernity" of thought. Blake, the apostle of imagination and inspiration, was to feel "Contempt and Abhorrence" for the Enquiry, as he would have felt for most modern psychology, for in Burke's essay there is shadowed forth the materialistic implication of twentieth-century psychological investigation, the method that seeks a physical explanation even for art itself.¹

Blake's contempt and abhorrence for the Enquiry's "physical explanation for art" is less than surprising, but his remark in the Discourses marginalia that "on [Burke's] Treatise Reynolds has grounded many of his assertions" (MG 640) is more puzzling. Blake further ranks Bacon, Newton,

and Locke together with Burke and Reynolds, and concludes that they all, as empirical thinkers, "mock Inspiration & Vision" (MG 650).

In Burke's theory of sensationism, which proceeded from his conviction that the nature of man is bound to a "strict law and very narrow limits" (E 4), Blake would likely have seen, as he saw in Wordsworth, "the Natural Man rising up against the Spiritual Man Continually" (MG 654). Sensationism to Blake is simply another instance of the empiricist view of divided man, the spectrous separation of body and soul, division of subject and object, or abstraction of quality from substance, which Blake also saw in Reynolds. Blake's definition of the body as "a portion of Soul discerned by the five Senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age" (MHH 34) illustrates both his view of the senses and his refusal to separate the natural and physical from the spiritual and mental. But this statement also reveals his conviction that natural man "in this age" is the fallen form of his true spiritual self, and that the body is merely a limitation, or in his words, "incrustation" upon the soul. In Blake's view, Burke's sensationism is an inverted image of the true relationship between the senses and the mind; and by placing all the emphasis upon the senses as the original source of knowledge, Burke simply perpetuates the empirical fallacy. Similarly, Burke's intention, stated at the outset of the Enquiry, to follow a "sober and attentive investigation of the laws of nature, by which those properties [of objects] are capable of affecting

the body, and thus of exciting our passions" (E 1) also reverses what Blake considers the true relative positions of mind to object, or man to nature, and hence takes a backward approach to epistemology.

In "All Religions are One" Blake himself sets out to examine the source of knowledge, the origin of our ideas, using his own method of inquiry, one which parodies that of empirical science: "As the true method of knowledge is experiment the true faculty of knowing must be the faculty which experiences. This faculty I treat of" (ARO 2). Once more, Blake takes up his contrary position, and argues that the mind is the original source of knowledge, that "the Poetic Genius is the true Man. and that the body or outward form of Man is derived from the Poetic Genius" (ARO 2).

Like Reynolds, Burke claims that there is a similitude in human nature, but his definition of it does not resemble any ideal: Burke sees the common fabric of the mind as springing from the identical "conformation" of the senses, which are "nearly, or altogether the same in all men, so the manner of perceiving external objects is in all men the same, or with little difference" (E 13). This general law of perception Blake opposes, saying that "Mans perceptions are not bounded by organs of perception. he perceives more than sense (tho' ever so acute) can discover" (NNR 2). Indeed, the imagination perceives objects of sense in an altogether different manner than the organs of sense:

The Nature of Visionary Fancy or Imagination

is very little Known & the Eternal nature
 & permanence of its ever Existent Images
 is considerd as less permanent than the
 things of Vegetative & Generative Nature
 yet the Oak dies as well as the Lettuce
 but Its Eternal Image & Individuality never
 dies. but renews by its seed. just {as}<so>
 the Imaginative Image returns {according to}
 <by> the seed of Contemplative Thought. (VLJ 544-45)

Considering the agreement of our perceptions, says Burke,
 we cannot "suffer ourselves to imagine, that their senses
 present to different men different images of things" (E 13);
 but for Blake, vision, perception, and images or ideas are
 one thing when reality is seen with the corporeal eye, and
 another when with the imaginative. Speaking of one of his
 own "Stupendous Visions," Blake says:

I have represented it as I saw it. to different
 People it appears differently as every thing
 else does for tho on Earth things seem Per-
 manent they are less permanent than a Shadow
 as we all know too well. (VLJ 544)

Burke's view of the mind as dependent upon images of
 sense made him, in Blake's opinion, as demonic as Locke;
 and Reynolds' dictum that the service of nature in art
 is "perfect freedom" was a contradiction founded on the
 reasoning of both. Blake thought Burke's picture of the
 imagination as a "sort of creative power" of the mind,
 "either in representing at pleasure the images of things in
 the order and manner in which they were received by the
 senses, or in combining those images in a new manner, and
 according to a different order" (E 16), to be nothing more
 than a false image in itself. This concept of the imagin-
 ation is obviously founded on sense impression itself, and

is of the same order as Reynolds' statement that "we perceive by sense, [and] combine by fancy" (D 143). But Reynolds, unlike Burke, says that the "poetical and sublime" (D 232) imagination, besides combining images of sense, pursues the ideal: to Blake, this was another contradiction based in part on the same line of thinking as Burke's, and in part on a true picture of the imagination. Blake writes that

This World <of Imagination> is Infinite & Eternal whereas the world of Generation or Vegetation is Finite & {for a small moment} Temporal There Exist in that Eternal World the Permanent Realities of Every Thing which we see reflected in this Vegetable Glass of Nature. (VLJ 545)

Burke attributes all the principles of the mind to nature to an extreme Reynolds never approached when he states that such principles "are not derived from any particular habits or advantages" (E 17). Reynolds, like Blake, certainly extolled the advantages and powers of individual genius; though, contradictorily again, he states that any mind's powers of invention cannot operate without its stored-up sense impressions:

Invention, strictly speaking, is little more than a new combination of those images which have been previously gathered and deposited in the memory: nothing can come of nothing: he who has laid up no materials, can produce no combinations. (D 15-16)

To this idea of mental passivity, Blake replies, "Is the Mind Nothing?" (MG 646), the implication being that all men have minds, and all minds images, whether or not they are intentionally gathered, deposited, or laid up. And by claiming

that imagination and invention depend upon images or memories of sense perception, both Reynolds and Burke are underestimating what Blake considers the active power of the mind.

Blake holds that the mind is totally free of the senses, and "If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern" (MHH 39). Indeed, sense perceptions may be altered, not merely combined or rearranged, by the power of imagination which transforms them into "the Imaginative Image" or idea. The senses, then, can hardly be "the great originals of all our ideas" (E 23) as Burke claims, and true knowledge does not "depend[] upon experience and observation" (E 18), but upon the power of perception.

In his discussion of taste, Burke writes:

So far then as Taste belongs to the imagination, its principle is the same in all men; there is no difference in the manner of their being affected, nor in the causes of the affection; but in the degree there is a difference, which arises from two causes principally; either from a greater degree of natural sensibility [i.e. acuteness of sense], or from a closer and longer attention to the object. (E 21)

Blake, on the contrary, says that "Taste & Genius are Not Teachable or Acquirable but are born with us" (MG 648); they, like perception, are active mental principles and cannot be "the same in all men" as Burke would have us believe. Furthermore, such principles are, like knowledge of ideal beauty, innate ideas, the whole of which Blake calls "Innate Science" (MG 637). This "innate science" is true knowledge in Blake's

epistemology, and it corresponds to the mind's seeking to know its own nature, that nature being the true self since a man's innate ideas are "truly himself." The active principles of the mind, therefore, including taste and genius, must depend upon the nature or identity of the individual mind.

In A Vision of the Last Judgment Blake tells us that "Each Identity is Eternal" (VLJ 546). Thus, if the mind has any identity at all, it cannot be dependent upon either the material world or the body, nor can it rest with the bodily senses or the images of objects received by the mind, all of which are subject to change and transitory by nature:

In Eternity one Thing never Changes into
another Thing Each Identity is Eternal . . .
Lots Wife being Changed into Pillar of Salt
alludes to the Mortal Body being rendered a
Permanent Statue but not Changed or Trans-
formed into Another Identity while it retains
its own Individuality. A Man can never become
Ass nor Horse some are born with shapes of
Men who may be both but Eternal Identity is
one thing & Corporeal Vegetation is another
thing. (VLJ 546)

The identity of the individual, therefore, is not equivalent to his material existence, but to his active intelligence, which is a particular form of the whole of existence that is eternal.

NOTES

¹ Monk, p. 96.

VII. THE GENERAL AND PARTICULAR IN JERUSALEM

The last of Blake's Songs of Experience is "The Voice of the Ancient Bard," a short poem which heralds the apocalypse as the dawning light of truth dispelling the "clouds of reason" and darkness of error and ignorance:

Youth of delight come hither:
And see the opening morn,
Image of truth new born
Doubt is fled & clouds of reason
Dark disputes & artful teasing.
Folly is an endless maze,
Tangled roots perplex her ways,
How many have fallen there!
They stumble all night over bones of the
 dead;
And feel they know not what but care;
And wish to lead others when they should
 be led. (SE 31-32)

In order to lead his reader out of the endless maze of dark disputes created by the reasoning mind, Blake has created a literary system of two parts, one a philosophical argument with its own pattern of logical puzzles and axiomatic clues artfully designed to entice our rational powers into "Serpent Reasonings," and the other a poetic statement or image of truth "addressed to the Imagination which is Spiritual Sensation & but mediately to the Understanding or Reason" (L 677). While Blake's epistemological theories may be sought primarily in his prose and the imaginative vision in his poetry, it is a mistake to try to comprehend one without a close reading of the other. In fact, the distinctions between Blake's philosophical thought and poetic art--like those between his principles and opinions--seem to dissolve more rapidly the longer

we subject them to analysis. This does not make Blake a poetic philosopher or a philosophical poet, but it does reveal that even in his most prosaic comment Blake speaks as an artist whose argument is at all times informed by his prophetic vision. It is Blake's conviction that art must be practiced in all things without fail: "Prayer is the Study of Art Praise is the Practise of Art Fasting &c. all relate to Art . . . Practise is Art If you leave off you are Lost" (PS 272).

Similarly, Blake's two-part system must be seen as one whole emanating from his central vision.¹ This system is actually an art form which simultaneously attacks one way of thinking--the rational--and upholds another--the imaginative--which is not its opposite but its contrary. Moreover, the philosophical and imaginative aspects of Blake's system are, when taken together, the whole of his dialectic which proceeds in the same manner as the progression of any two contraries, one being necessary to the existence of the other as well as to the whole of which each is a part. The philosophical side of Blake's dialectic does not lead to some one highest principle (like Reynolds' general nature) through a definition of interrelated terms: as we have seen, the use of such a rational method of inquiry in reading Blake, though necessary and extremely fruitful, continually turns us back to one basic proposition, that reason alone is unable to define any ultimate reality, which proposition is not only repeatedly stated but worked out in the reading process as the reader thinks,

reasons, and inquires. But Blake's dialectic also permits only one logical conclusion, that reasoning is by nature self-contradictory. Frustrated at least in part by the logic of Blake's system, we must then turn to the other side of his dialectic, the one which affirms imaginative truth at the same time it negates or attacks truth derived from reasoning. As I have argued, both reason and imagination, logical conclusions and self-evident truths, intellectual connections and aesthetic responses, exist as contraries necessary to each other throughout Blake's writings.

Blake's axiom, that "Self Evident Truth is one Thing and Truth the result of Reasoning is another Thing" (MG 610), does not flatly state that reasoned truth is false, nor does Blake declare this anywhere else. In fact, reasoned truth, as a contrary, must be somehow useful or "necessary to Human existence" (MHH 34). Besides, Blake does suggest that reasoned truth has reference to questions of good and evil by calling it "Rational Truth Root of Evil & Good" (KG 265). It is evident that Blake thinks of both self-evident truth and contraries as real, and of reasoned truth as itself a contrary. But any contrary alone is limited, and if one attempts to destroy the other by usurping its place, the result will be a false relation between them, a warring rather than "friendly" opposition dangerous to all other relations between the parts of the whole as well. Reason, as a mental faculty, "once fairer than the light till fould in Knowledges dark Prison house" (PS 438), is not in itself a false fiction; but it is

the propensity of reason to distinguish one thing from another, and since it may keep contraries apart by calling one good and the other evil, Blake says that "All Quarrels arise from Reasoning" (J 64:20). Thus, if reasoning is to set itself up as the only truth, it must negate the existence of imaginative, unreasoned, intuitive, or self-evident truth.

But this does not mean that reasoned truth is necessarily false: if we have participated in Blake's dialectic to the full, for instance, our reasonings may direct us toward non-rational truth, and the distinctions or divisions we make will not involve dark disputes over questions of good and evil, but instead what Blake calls the combats of truth and error, the mental war involving an opposition between contraries which is true friendship: "The Combats of Good & Evil <is Eating of the Tree of Knowledge The Combats of Truth & Error is Eating of the Tree of Life>" (VLJ 553). Blake argues that the fallen world of experience is created by ignorance which is paradoxically identical to knowledge of good and evil; and this world, along with the contention, strife, and divided quarrels that characterize it, results from that reasoning which sets the fictional categories of virtue and vice, good and evil, one against the other. Hence, all disputes stemming from such an opposition of categories will be self-contradictory and false because initially founded on a fiction which has reference only to knowledge and not to life. Only reason, moreover, wishes to rule and exist in an unchanging

world free of opposite or contrary qualities. As Urizen, who is reason, says in an attempt to deny that "Man was made for Joy & Woe" (AI 56), "I have sought for a joy without pain,/For a solid without fluctuation" (BU 4:10-11).

In Jerusalem Blake describes how the Sons of Albion "take the Two Contraries which are call'd Qualities, with which/Every Substance is clothed, they name them Good & Evil" (J 10:8-9); and in A Vision of the Last Judgment says that "<Good & Evil are Qualities in Every Man whether <a> Good or Evil Man > These are Enemies & destroy one another by every Means in their power both of deceit & of open Violence" (VLJ 553). From this, we may see that all men and all substances possess contrary qualities, of which good and evil are two in name only. Moreover, these qualities, at least in the form of good and evil, are in a state of destructive opposition. In a quite different way, the two contrary sides of Blake's dialectic--that which addresses the reader's logic and reason, and that which appeals to his imagination--oppose one another within the larger framework of his literary art. Their opposition is not a "war" but a co-operation designed to destroy the false categorical fictions of "good" and "evil," which are merely two abstract terms describing the contraries which are both true and real. Such false fictions or reasoned negations must be opposed in order to redeem the true contraries, as the full context of the passage from Jerusalem makes clear:

And this is the manner of the Sons of Albion
in their strength

simple rules of life" (J 65:27-28). This, Blake states in Jerusalem, is cause of "Abstract Philosophy warring in enmity against Imagination" (J 5:58).

In A Vision of the Last Judgment, we find that the combats of truth and error "are not only Universal but Particular. Each are Personified" (VLJ 553). This statement performs two functions: first, it makes an identification between the categories of the universal and particular; and second, it defines them both as human, presumably in reference to collective and individual man respectively. Blake goes on to say that "General Knowledge is Remote Knowledge it is in Particulars that Wisdom consists & Happiness too" (VLJ 550). From this, we see that Blake postulates three categories, the universal, particular, and general, the first two being human and real, the last remote and false. The drama of Jerusalem, in broad outline, concerns the imagination's, or Los's, desire to reveal the true identity of the universal and particular, to unite them by casting out the false body of abstract generalizations about the nature of man which arise from empirical philosophy. Los must act against the "Swell'd & bloated General Forms, repugnant to the Divine-/Humanity, who is the Only General and Universal Form" (J 38:19-20). Furthermore, this drama--a purely mental one--seeks to show how the nature of the mind is such that thought, outside of which Blake says there is no existence, is capable of taking only one of two contrary forms: reasoning selfhood or imaginative unity. That is, the mind may move in one of two directions:

either toward the concrete idea or, in Blake's terms, "image"² of the identity of all things, including the perceiving subject and all objects of perception which together comprise the whole of reality; or toward the false, abstract idea of a self divided off from everything else, a conception in which only the distinguishing power of reason can persist. The former direction, then, leads to an image of oneness, "the Universal Brotherhood of Eden/The Universal Man" (FZ 3: 5-6), or to an idea in the form³ of an "Imaginative Image return[ing] {according to} <by> the seed of Contemplative Thought" (VLJ 545).⁴ The latter direction, however, ends in an isolated selfhood which must, in order to achieve any sense of unity at all, abstract common characteristics from the diversity of things, either human or objective. These characteristics or qualities are then compared, and, if they appear within reason alike, their aggregate is termed "general nature." Blake calls this intellectual process "hermaphroditic," a false marriage of contrary qualities which cannot be forced to exist as wedded sexes because they are equally true, any distinction, like sex itself, being just another fiction of the reasoning mind. Blake argues that "Sexes must vanish & cease/To be" (J 92:13-14).

Contraries, in Blake's system, are either perceptible qualities or ideas, but they should not be identified with categories which are really only reasoned abstractions. Indeed, the term "contrary" itself is a kind of anti-category category which Blake uses to delineate sets of opposed cate-

gorical abstractions such as the subjective and objective, mind and body, infinite and finite, true and false, one and many, material and immaterial, god and man, man and nature, time and space, general and particular, existence and non-existence--all of which he sees as the traps of empirical reasoning. To Blake's mind, all of them are equally true; in fact, the only two terms that his system will admit as truly contrary are "truth" and "error." In this context, truth is the paradoxical perception that while concrete images or ideas are true, abstract ideas and categories are false, and those who hold them will be creating error by thinking and acting on false distinctions. The truth is that "all of us on earth are united in thought" (MG 590) because we all have the power of thought.

One such false distinction is "general nature," an idea which demands that all particularities, anything which does not fit the terms of rational analysis, be left out, denied, and negated. Blake upholds the contrary idea of the particular to show that the logical result of general reasoning is that the reasoner's own mental existence will be negated by the terms of his analytical system. This is the self-contradiction which Blake claims must characterize all reasoning. Blake contends that because thought, which he says is our existence, informs our entire waking consciousness, to say that any particular thought is not true is to deny the existence of a part, and therefore the whole, of ourselves. On the other hand, if we deny our thoughts, it may be that

we have no thought at all, and are not in waking consciousness but at best in a state of sleep, which is why the speaker of Jerusalem calls, "Awake! awake O sleeper of the land of shadows, wake!" (J 4:6). This "land of shadows" Blake also describes as "a Void, outside of Existence" (J 1:1), a state of no thought.

Blake's system affirms everything which exists as true and real, "For every thing that lives is Holy" (MHH 44), and equates thought, life, and existence. It further upholds universal thought as the means of losing not one's identity but one's selfhood, the spectre or reasoning power. The universal thinker accomplishes this by no longer reasoning, no longer separating himself from universal being as an isolated, autonomous self. Then, and only then, will he be in his thought or existence united with eternity which "Exists and All things in Eternity Independent of Creation" (VLJ 553). Only a fool, by Blake's definition, could think that his physical body defines the identity of his form, or his reasonings the identity of his mind--such thoughts, in Blake's opinion, logically proceed to an idea of eternal death. Opposed to this idea is the vision of eternal life, which no one can imagine as identical to the particular spaces experienced by the body, or to the particular moments of a lifetime, although, paradoxically, either of these may open into universal thoughts of infinity and eternity, or what Blake calls "A vision of the Eternal Now" (MG 581). But the essence or origin of material existence is unknown to us in any case,

no matter how diligently the natural philosopher--who forgets that "Each thing is its own cause & its own effect" (MG 590)--seeks to discover first causes. The only existence we do know is in thought:

Mental Things are alone Real [existing]
 what is Calld Corporeal Nobody Knows of
 its dwelling Place [i.e. where it exists
 or if it lives] <it>is in Fallacy [it exists
 only in reasoning] & its Existence an Im-
 posture [we can only pretend to define by
 reasoning the existence of anything] Where
 is the Existence Out of Mind or Thought
 Where is it but in the Mind of a Fool. (VLJ 555)

The fool, therefore, who claims to know the existence of anything outside his own thought, that is, of objects or created forms which are not his thought, is entirely contradictory in his claim. No one can have knowledge of something that is not thought, for he will then be having thoughts of non-thought, which means he really has no thought at all. Blake's rhetorical question, "Tell me what is a thought? & of what substance is it made?/Tell me what is a joy? & in what gardens do joys grow?" (VDA 3:23-24), cannot be answered, for it is self-evident that thought has no substance, no material existence. Still, that thought exists is also an obvious fact, and Blake's point is that without it, we know the existence of nothing and nothing of existence.

It is this fool, or this type of thinking, which attempts to deny the independence of thought, especially of those imagined ideas not caused or affected by corporeal existence. In the following passage from Jerusalem, the fool is named "Babel," and the imaginative idea of life "Jesus," who is

also called "the Resurrection & the Life" (J 62:18):

O Lord & Saviour, have the Gods of the Heathen
 pierced thee?
 Or hast thou been pierced in the House of thy
 Friends?
 Art thou alive! & livest thou for-evermore?
 or art thou
 Not: but a delusive shadow, a thought that
 liveth not.
 Babel mocks saying, there is no God nor Son
 of God
 That thou O Human Imagination, O Divine Body
 art all
 A delusion. (J 60:52-58)

These lines are spoken by Jerusalem, who is herself the personification of an idea "called Liberty among the Children of Albion" (J 54:5).

The fool is also the unconscious sleeper who exists in a nothingness (Ulro) created by his dreams or thoughts of non-thought, of something other than life, of reasoned fictions. It is this sleep to which the opening lines of Jerusalem refer: "Of the Sleep of Ulro! and of the passage through/ Eternal Death! and of the awaking to Eternal Life" (J 4:1-2). Here the awakening process represents Jerusalem itself, or more precisely, what the poem is intended to do once it conducts us through the performance of reading and thinking, or in Blake's terms, "identifying" and "defining." This is a passage through "eternal death" because it is an attempt to understand the eternal reality which Blake's imagination or Los keeps trying to identify and define for us through reasoning. And this attempt is founded in doubt about the nature of existence. Jerusalem, though it is designed to clarify the reader's dilemma with reasoned assertions about reality

and truth, will not resolve his questions with rational arguments, for these, besides being dogmatic, would be all too vulnerable to contradiction by anyone. Rather, Blake's method is to expand and multiply questions, to "open the Eternal Worlds, to open the immortal Eyes/Of Man inwards into the Worlds of Thought: into Eternity/Ever expanding in the Bosom of God. the Human Imagination" (J 5:18-20). One of Blake's "Proverbs of Hell" is that "One thought. fills immensity" (MHH 36), and it is this type of thought which Jerusalem seeks to provoke, thought which does not remain enclosed within a system of reasoning but rather releases or frees the mind by generating ideas that cannot be circumscribed nor contained by verbal assertions. These must be cast out as the "excrementitious husk" or false body of reasoned opinions. Thus, the expanded senses at the end of Jerusalem operate by

Circumscribing & Circumcising the
excrementitious
Husk & Covering into Vacuum evaporating revealing
the lineaments of Man
Driving outward the Body of Death in an Eternal
Death & Resurrection
Awaking it to Life among the Flowers of Beulah
rejoicing in Unity
In the Four Senses in the Outline the Circum-
ference & Form, for ever
In Forgiveness of Sins which is Self Annihila-
tion. (J 98:18-23)

Imaginative truth cannot be proved, it must be known immediately by the perceiver. Blake's purpose is not to teach, but to reveal the nature of thought and power of images or ideas by clearly defining assertions for the reader to whom they are self-evident, but ambiguous or "Shadowy to those who

dwell not in them, meer possibilities:/But to those who enter into them they seem the only substances/For every thing exists" (J 13:64-66). As we have seen, in Blake's system everything possible to be believed is an image of truth, and those who do not believe in the power of individual thought are those who "doubted & despair'd & imputed Sin & Righteousness/To Individuals & not to States, and these Slept in Ulro" (J 25:15-16).

Blake's doctrine of the identity of the universal and particular is based on the fact that expanding "Worlds of Thought" exist only in the individual's mind, for they are entirely self-created; and only in it can the perception of the many as one or one as many exist. That, too, must be self-created. This perception, moreover, exists for all men because all men possess and share in the power of thought which defines human identity--the word "identity" here being used by Blake to refer to the state of being identical, or sameness; the fact of being a specified person or thing; and the state or quality of persisting unchanged, which Blake calls "eternity." It is this identity from which Albion turns away in the second chapter of Jerusalem, "Turning from Universal Love petrific as he went" (J 34:7), while the saving vision follows after him:

mild the Saviour follow'd him,
 Displaying the Eternal Vision! the Divine
 Similitude!
 In loves and tears of brothers, sisters, sons,
 fathers, and friends
 Which if Man ceases to behold, he ceases to exist:
 Saying. Albion! Our wars are wars of life, &
 wounds of love,

With intellectual spears, & long winged arrows
of thought:
Mutual in one anothers love and wrath all renewing
We live as One Man; for contracting our infinite
senses
We behold multitude; or expanding: we behold
as one,
As One Man all the Universal Family; and that
One Man
We call Jesus the Christ: and he is us, and we
in him,
Live in perfect harmony in Eden the land of life,
Giving, recieving, and forgiving each others
trespasses. (J 34:10-22)

The doctrine of forgiveness of sins expressed in this last line is also conceivable only in terms of the particular: that is, only the individual can annihilate his selfhood of mistaken separateness "Idolatrous to his own Shadow" (J 43:46), cast the spectre of his rational power "into the lake," and act in a spirit of benevolence toward his fellow man: "All broad & general principles belong to benevolence/Who protects minute particulars, every one in their own identity" (J 38: 22-23). The failure of the individual to realize the unity of mankind always precedes the destruction of other individuals, and it is this destruction Los must act against:

Fearing that Albion should turn his back against
the Divine Vision
Los took his globe of fire to search the interiors
of Albions
Bosom, in all the terrors of friendship, entering
the caves
Of despair & death, to search the tempters out,
walking among
Albions rocks & precipices! caves of solitude
& dark despair,
And saw every Minute Particular of Albion
degraded & murderd
But saw not by whom; they were hidden within
in the minute particulars
Of which they had possessd themselves; and there
they take up

The articulations of a mans soul, and laugh-
 ing throw it down
 Into the frame, then knock it out upon the
 plank, & souls are bak'd
 In bricks to build the pyramids of Heber &
 Terah. But Los
 Searchd in vain: closd from the minutia he
 walkd, difficult.
 He came down from Highgate . . .
 . . . And saw every minute particular, the
 jewels of Albion, running down
 The kennels of the streets & lanes as if they
 were abhorrd.
 Every Universal Form, was become barren moun-
 tains of Moral
 Virtue: and every Minute Particular hardend
 into grains of sand:
 And all the tendernesses of the soul cast forth
 as filth & mire,
 Among the winding places of deep contemplation
 intricate. (J 45:2-22)

These "winding places" are, of course, reasonings; but Los's
 action cannot take the form of vengeance against individual
 reasoners or "tempters." Not only are these tempters also
 systems or "frames," they are ideas which are "hidden" within
 the mind of the individual who is "possessed" by them and be-
 comes their victim. The victims in turn become reasoners,
 whom Blake calls "grains of sand" to suggest their thoughtless
 state, and they, too, must be exempt from Los's vengeance--
 otherwise, he would contradict his own doctrine of the for-
 giveness of sins:

What shall I do! what could I do, if I could find
 these Criminals
 I could not dare to take vengeance; for all
 things are so constructed
 And builded by the Divine hand, that the sinner
 shall always escape,
 And he who takes vengeance alone is the criminal
 of Providence;
 If I should dare to lay my finger on a grain of
 sand

From Albion: but hath founded his Reaction
 into a Law
 Of Action, for Obedience to destroy the Con-
 traries of Man. (J 43:10-15)

Again, Blake suggests that systematic reasoning forms laws and "admits of no reply"--"reply" here ambiguously referring to questioning in the form of contrary assertions--because it is self-enclosed, a selfhood sufficient unto, but only unto, itself:

The Spectre is the Reasoning Power in Man;
 & when separated
 From Imagination, and closing itself as in
 steel, in a Ratio
 Of the Things of Memory. It thence frames
 Laws & Moralities
 To destroy Imagination! the Divine Body, by
 Martyrdoms & Wars. (J 74:10-13)

Furthermore, this selfhood aims to destroy the contraries of man by negating one of them, the imaginative, and upholding divided categories:

What is a Wife & what is a Harlot? What is
 a Church? & What
 Is a Theatre? are they Two & not One? can
 they Exist Separate?
 Are not Religion & Politics the Same Thing?
 Brotherhood is Religion
 O Demonstrations of Reason Dividing Families
 in Cruelty & Pride! (J 57:8-11)

For Blake, "There is a place where Contrarities are equally true" (J 48:14), and this place is in the mind which perceives the unity of all men: "Every one knows, we are One Family: One Man blessed for ever" (J 55:46). The members of this divine family, which Blake identifies with the "Divine Vision," ask:

 what have we to do with the Dead?
 To be their inferiors or superiors we equally
 abhor;

Superior, none we know: inferior none: all
equal share
Divine Benevolence & joy, for the Eternal Man
Walketh among us, calling us his Brothers &
his Friends. (J 55:6-10)

The labours of the divine family, divine vision, imagination, one man, or Los--all of which are identical as "Living Creatures"--are to

Compell the Reasoner to Demonstrate with
unhewn Demonstrations
Let the Indefinite be explored. and let every
Man be Judged
By his own Works, Let all Indefinites be thrown
into Demonstrations
To be pounded to dust & melted in the Furnaces
of Affliction:
He who would do good to another, must do it
in Minute Particulars
General Good is the plea of the scoundrel
hypocrite & flatterer:
For Art & Science cannot exist but in minutely
organized Particulars
And not in generalizing Demonstrations of the
Rational Power.
The Infinite alone resides in Definite & Deter-
minate Identity
Establishment of Truth depends on destruction
of Falshood continually
On Circumcision: not on Virginity, O Reasoners
of Albion. (J 55:56-66)

Reasoning's attempt to formulate an abstract general nature common to all men results, as we have seen, in a "dark Hermaphrodite," a self-contradictory mixture of truth and falsehood jumbled together; and it is this "Sexual Reasoning Hermaphroditic" which tries to identify human nature solely with physical characteristics, giving man a mock identity with the mortal body which is not the seat of life because it dies. Such reasoning is nothing but a false or "closed" perception of only one-half of human nature:

If Perceptive Organs vary: Objects of
 Perception seem to vary:
 If the Perceptive Organs close: their Objects
 seem to close also:
 Consider this O mortal Man! O worm of sixty
 winters said Los
 Consider Sexual Organization & hide thee in
 the dust. (J 30:55-58)

The danger of false perception is that

What seems to Be: Is: To those to
 whom
 It seems to Be, & is productive of the most
 dreadful
 Consequences to those to whom it seems to Be:
 even of
 Torments, Despair, Eternal Death. (J 32:51-54)

But it is actually "Satan this Body of Doubt that Seems but
 Is Not" (J 92:20); and reasoning, in a real not illusory
 sense, builds its own world:

They build a stupendous Building on the Plain
 of Salisbury; with chains
 Of rocks round London Stone: of Reasonings:
 of unhewn Demonstrations
 In labyrinthine arches. (Mighty Urizen the
 Architect.) thro which
 The Heavens might revolve & Eternity be bound
 in their chain.
 Labour unparallelld! a wondrous rocky World of
 cruel destiny
 Rocks piled on rocks reaching the stars:
 stretching from pole to pole.
 The Building is Natural Religion & its Altars
 Natural Morality
 A building of eternal death: whose proportions
 are eternal despair
 Here Vala stood turning the iron Spindle of
 destruction
 From heaven to earth: howling! invisible! but
 not invisible. (J 66:2-11)

The objective world, here named Vala, is described paradox-
 ically as "invisible! but not invisible" because it can be
 visibly transformed or altered by invisible thought; and
 that transformation will depend on the state of mind, or the

organ of perception, which thinks and acts upon the world. The eye of imagination, however, sees the interdependency of all things, "For All Things Exist in the Human Imagination" (J 69:25). This Blake articulates again in the form of a paradox which identifies man and the objective world:

For all are Men in Eternity. Rivers Mountains
Cities Villages,
All are Human & when you enter into their Bosoms
you walk
In Heavens & Earths; as in your own Bosom you
bear your Heaven
And Earth, & all you behold, tho it appears
Without it is Within
In your Imagination of which this World of
Mortality is but a Shadow. (J 71:15-19)

In the fourth and final chapter of Jerusalem, Los warns that

No Individual ought to appropriate to
Himself
Or to his Emanation, any of the Universal
Characteristics
Of David or of Eve, of the Woman, or of the
Lord.
Of Reuben or of Benjamin, of Joseph or Judah
or Levi.
Those who dare appropriate to themselves
Universal Attributes
Are the Blasphemous Selfhoods & must be broken
asunder.
A Vegetated Christ & a Virgin Eve, are the
Hermaphroditic Blasphemy. (J 90:28-35)

Just as only the individual who reasons can think of himself as separate from the universal whole, only the reasoner can imagine that he is a whole unto himself; indeed, both are the same error: "When the Individual appropriates Universality/ He divides into Male & Female [subject versus object]: & when the Male & Female,/Appropriate Individuality, they become an Eternal Death" (J 90:52-54). Blake's argument is that "sexes

must vanish and cease to be," and that

he who wishes to see a Vision; a
 perfect Whole
 Must see it in its Minute Particulars; Or-
 ganized & not as thou
 O Fiend of Righteousness pretendest; thine
 is a Disorganized
 And snowy cloud: brooder of temptests &
 destructive War.
 You smile with pomp & rigor: you talk of
 benevolence & virtue!
 I act with benevolence & Virtue & get murderd
 time after time:
 You accumulate Particulars, & murder by ana-
 lyzing, that you
 May take the aggregate; & you call the aggre-
 gate Moral Law:
 And you call that Swelld & bloated Form; a
 Minute Particular.
 But General Forms have their vitality in
 Particulars: & every
 Particular is a Man; a Divine Member of the
 Divine Jesus. (J 91:20-30)

General forms--the word "form" referring to something created--
 have their vitality or life only in particular men. Blake does
 not deny that we experience the material world and the physi-
 cal body; both, however, are known to die--at least, they are
 known to be transitory, to pass away, degenerate, and change
 their form. But the contrary to creation and death is life,
 and so only life regenerates itself in a continual resur-
 rection of created forms which never appear to the eye of
 imagination to dissolve into nonentity: "Whatever can be
 Created can be Annihilated Forms cannot" (M 32:36). But to
 the reasoning mind, life is not eternal because one's own
 body dies, and when that becomes part of nonentity, so must
 the mind along with it. This conclusion, argues Blake, is
 reached when the individual identifies his inner, immaterial
 existence with the material existence outside him: "There

is an Outside spread Without, & an Outside spread Within/
 Beyond the Outline of Identity both ways, which meet in One:/
 An orb'd Void of doubt, despair, hunger, & thirst & sorrow"
 (J 18:2-4). This "One" is general nature, a false herma-
 phroditic idea of the unity of the particular and universal.
 It is an idea created by the all-devouring ego, the "Great
 Selfhood," which through reasoning hungrily tries to draw all
 things outside it into its "Selfish Center" and dominate
 everything without the circumference of individual identity.

But the true identity of the individual does not depend
 on either the ego or materiality: identity is a particular
 form of life only, an outline or circumference delineating
 one part of eternal being as a whole: "What is Above is
 Within, for every-thing in Eternity is translucent:/The
 Circumference is Within: Without, is formed the Selfish Center/
 And the Circumference still expands going forward to Eternity"
 (J 71:6-8). The idea of identity, then, is a particular idea,
 and on the basis of it Blake upholds both his aesthetic prin-
 ciples of the outline in painting,

A Spirit and a Vision are not, as the modern
 philosophy supposes, a cloudy vapour or a
 nothing: they are organized and minutely arti-
 culated beyond all that the mortal and per-
 ishing nature can produce. He who does not
 imagine in stronger and better lineaments,
 and in stronger and better light than his per-
 ishing mortal eye can see does not imagine at
 all. The painter of this work asserts that
 all his imaginations appear to him infinitely
 more perfect and more minutely organized than
 any thing seen by his mortal eye. Spirits are
 organized men: Moderns wish to draw figures
 without lines, and with great and heavy sha-
 dows; are not shadows more unmeaning than
 lines, and more heavy? O who can doubt this! (PS 532);

and of form in poetry: "Every Poem must necessarily be a perfect Unity . . . But when a Work has Unity it is as much in a Part as in the Whole" (PS 267).

NOTES

¹ See Edward J. Rose's discussion in "Blake's Milton: The Poet as Poem," Blake Studies, 1 (Fall, 1968), 23.

² Blake prefers the word "image" to "idea," although he directly connects it with "thought," which is in turn defined as a mental (or visual) perception called "vision" or "imagination": "If the Spectator could Enter into these Images in his Imagination approaching them on the Fiery Chariot of his Contemplative Thought . . . " (VLJ 550).

³ Blake defines "form" in the context of either art or physical nature, not as an idea, nor does he equate it with an "image."

⁴ Blake further equates in one instance (an ambiguous conditional statement) "thought" and "life": "If thought is life/And strength & breath;/And the want/Of thought is death . . . " (SE 24). Blake often equates the contextual as well as lexical meaning of two words by placing each in the same context though not always at the same time. When he does this, his contextual definition usually identifies a specific, concrete image with an abstract and/or concrete noun ("furnace" with desire and/or the physical body; "veil" with nature and/or delusion), or a specific proper noun with an abstract and/or concrete concept ("Vala" with the material world and/or illusion; "Los" with a poet and/or the imagination). This accounts for Blake's use of the word "image" to signify what we may translate through context as "idea." It is likely

that Blake would not use "idea" because of its Lockean and Platonic connotations, and the danger of any suggestion of "abstraction." See Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Book III, Chapter iii.

From our analysis of his treatment of the general versus particular, it would appear that Blake's dialectic is as much a unity in each of its contrary parts, the philosophic and poetic, as it is in the whole, which consists of the body of his principles or opinions. It is also clear that Blake's system defines its terms by identifying or equating them, and then opposing them one to another as contrary ideas. But to the imaginative mind, all contrary ideas are equal despite their distinct identities: death is therefore a part of life, and life of death; time of eternity and eternity of time; joy of woe and woe of joy: "Excess of sorrow laughs. Excess of joy weeps"; "Joys impregnate. Sorrows bring forth"; "Joys laugh not! Sorrows weep not!" (MHH 36-37). Indeed, any part is always a part of a whole, and contrary parts together always comprise the whole in its entirety. With respect to Blake's system of logic, this means that any one of the highest principles he upholds (for example, existence or eternity) always has its contrary idea (nonentity or time). Blake then either posits a third category (thought or life) which includes them both, that third category in turn having its contrary (body or creation), or else identifies the original two (existence is eternity). Thus, the reasoner is always prevented from arriving at a single highest principle of the order of Reynolds' general nature.

In terms of Blake's system as we have analyzed it, if

we are not with Blake, who is non-contradictory, non-reasoning, and hence self-evidently true, we must be false, his contrary, and against him. At least, this is what he claims:

Doubts are always pernicious Especially when we Doubt our Friends Christ is very decided on this Point. "He who is Not With Me is Against Me" There is no Medium or Middle state & if a Man is the Enemy of my Spiritual Life while he pretends to be the Friend of my Corporeal. he is a Real Enemy--but the Man may be the friend of my Spiritual Life while he seems the Enemy of my Corporeal but Not Vice Versa.
(L 697)

From this statement, and the logical premise it embodies, arises much of that vehemence--Blake would call it "wrath"--characteristic of Blake's opposition to the Age of Reason, or indeed to anyone who appeared to him to be reasoning: "Half Friendship," he writes, "is the bitterest Enmity" (J 1:8). This accounts for his violent reaction against any sign of empirical thinking in his contemporaries, but it does not explain his apotheosis of Milton, for example, who clearly prizes reason. But Milton defines reason as "right" if it is spiritual, and "false" if it is not.¹ Besides, Blake appears to condemn only reasoning, or the reasoning power, and all the divided forms or ideas it creates.

Blake gives the term "reason" its own set of axiomatic definitions which we have not explored, one of them being that reason is a "contrary," and another that it is a "state":

Distinguish therefore States from Individuals
in those States.

States Change: but Individual Identities
 never change nor cease:
 You cannot go to Eternal Death in that which
 can never Die. . . .
 . . . States that are not, but ah! Seem to be.

Judge then of thy Own Self: thy Eternal Line-
 aments explore
 What is Eternal & what Changeable? & what
 Annihilable!
 The Imagination is not a State: it is the
 Human Existence itself
 Affection or Love becomes a State, when divided
 from Imagination
 The Memory is a State always, & the Reason is
 a State
 Created to be Annihilated & a new Ratio Created
 Whatever can be Created can be Annihilated
 Forms cannot. (M 32:22-36)

Reason, then, is a state of mind in which ideas come into
 and pass out of existence, while the form of those ideas never
 changes. That form is either twofold--positive and negative--
 or free of positive and negative distinctions: the former is
 the state of mind of reasoning that sees one or both of two
 things all the time, and the latter the rational though ima-
 ginative perception or vision--"The Imagination is not a
 State"--of all things existing at once.

States of mind, of which reason is one, must exist also,
 whereas reasoning does not. Therefore, reasoning is not a
 state of mind but rather the faculty contrary to the imagin-
 ation. Perception or vision, on the other hand, must be one
 of the two contrary states of the human soul and opposed to
 reason, also a state of the soul or mind. Since reason is
 "created to be annihilated," so must perception; and both,
 then, belong to the transitory world of the annihilation and
 recreation--not life and death--of created physical forms.

The imagination, however, belongs to the world of the eternal life of an image or identity of not a physical form, but a form seen only by the mind. Thus, when Blake writes that "human nature is the image of God" (MG 586), he is saying that human nature is the identity of God; and this explains why he calls reasoning--which is formless, nonexistent, and concerned with the world of death--"Satan."

In Jerusalem Blake defines "Three States of Ulro; Creation; Redemption. & Judgment" (J 32:42). The creation of mental images in a physical art form is indeed the province of the artistic imagination; and it appears as a state only in Ulro, that is, to the reasoning mind. The two true contrary states of mind are perception and reason, or "Redemption" and "Judgment." The explanation for these names lies in the fact that perception sees self-evident truth, and reason truth the result of reasoning, both of which are equally true. But perception redeems the mind from reasoning in a moment of time, while reason must arrive at judgments of truth through time. And since self-evident truth is truth itself, and truth the result of reasoning an error, a "last judgment" by reason united with perception is needed to end or overthrow the error of all reasoning:

The Last Judgment when all those are Cast
away who trouble Religion with Questions
concerning Good & Evil or Eating of the Tree
of those Knowledges or Reasonings which hin-
der the Vision of God turning all into a
Consuming fire <When> Imaginative Art & Sci-
ence & all Intellectual Gifts all the Gifts
of the Holy Ghost are {despisd} lookd upon
as of no use & only Contention remains to Man

then the Last Judgment begins & its Vision
is seen by the {Imaginative Eye} of Every
one according to the situation he holds. (VLJ 544)

Reason, as a contrary, is therefore necessary for one last judgment of truth and error, a judgment which takes only a moment to occur: "whenever any Individual Rejects Error & Embraces Truth a Last Judgment passes upon that Individual" (VLJ 551). However, Blake also describes his vision of "The Human Imagination who appeared to Me as Coming to Judgment" (VLJ 545). Both reason and imagination are evidently required for the rejection of error, at which moment our imaginative thoughts will be united with the created forms we perceive with our eyesight or visualize in our minds, and all the rational ideas or images of our thoughts united with identities we cannot perceive but can only imagine. Belief is therefore an image of, or a rationally imagined, truth which we cannot perceive; and perceived truth must be self-evident.

Blake, a self-made contrary to all systematic reasoners, divides his beliefs, or rationally imagined truths, into two parts: first, he states his rational truths in a philosophical way, since if we the readers do not already perceive them, we must reason about them. Second, Blake designs imagined truths artistically, as created forms of art with which we must unite our own imaginations in the act of perception. Blake's system as a whole comprehends both these contrary methods, the philosophical and the artistic, but the first alone is an error, merely ignorance of truth. Indeed, Blake's philosophical thought is built on circular logic and there can be

no end to reasoning about his statements. At some point, we must give up our rational attempt to follow the thread of his argument and enter into his art:

I give you the end of a golden string,
Only wind it into a ball:
It will lead you in at Heavens gate,
Built in Jerusalems wall. (J 77)

We will then have either perceived the truth of what Blake is saying, or else have failed in our reasoning to understand him. Thus, Blake says that if we are not with him we are false, and contrary to or against him; and from this stems the unreasonable arrogance of Blake's rhetorical stance as a prophet of truth.

But Blake holds contraries to be equally true--"Would to God that all the Lords people were Prophets" (M 1)--and so may see himself as both for and against us at the same time: "the Soldier who fights for Truth, calls his enemy his brother:/They fight & contend for life, & not for eternal death!" (J 38:41-42). Hence the importance of Blake's doctrine of continual self-sacrifice and forgiveness of sin or error, which argues that if any individual is against any other, then those two individuals are contraries but only the first is false and in error. "What is Liberty," asks Blake, "without Universal Toleration" (MG 624). Because "opposition is true friendship," Blake never states that contraries are in real or actual opposition: they are only when they seem to be, in a self-created quarrel. For Blake to say otherwise would be to deny his main tenet, "Lo! we are One" (J 4:20). This oneness is defined at

the end of Jerusalem by the apocalyptic vision in which all particular forms are perceived and identified as ideas to be continually regenerated and reborn as images in thought, the "bosom" of immortal life:

All Human Forms identified even Tree Metal
 Earth & Stone. all
 Human Forms identified, living going forth
 & returning wearied
 Into the Planetary lives of Years Months
 Days & Hours reposing
 And then Awakening into his Bosom in the Life
 of Immortality. (J 99:1-4)

It is in this spirit of oneness that Blake opposes his two contraries, Burke and Reynolds. But we may still wonder what the basis of this opposition is: does it rest on what Blake considered a false emphasis upon the general at the expense of the particular by Reynolds; or on a false distinction between mind and body by Burke; or does Blake simply attack the false opposition of any two contrary categories in any system of reasoning whatsoever? The answer is, of course, all three. But Blake is not only a contrary reasoner, he is a creator of systems and of art, an imaginative poet working toward the judgment to end all reasoned judgments. Besides, Blake would remind us that all quarrels arise from reasoning, and all contrary positions and categories are equivalent to "Two Horn'd Reasoning Cloven Fiction/In Doubt which is Self contradiction" (KG 265).

NOTES

¹ John Milton, Paradise Lost in John Milton, Complete Poems and Major Prose, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1957), IX, lines 348-56:

God left free the Will, for what obeys
Reason, is free, and Reason he made right,
But bid her well beware, and still erect
Lest by some fair appearing good surpris'd
She dictate false, and misinform the Will
To do what God expressly hath forbid.

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